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# Galaxy

## SCIENCE FICTION

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## MAN'S BAIT

A perennial theme in science fiction — and one I wish were less hardy — is the exploration of invasion techniques. Here, copyright 1955 by Time, Inc., and reprinted by permission, is a nastily inventive one:

"The female screw worm, a serious warm-country cattle pest, mates only once. Dr. A. W. Lindquist of the U.S. Department of Agriculture told a Tampa meeting of entomologists how this determined monogamy may be the screw worm's undoing.

"The adult females, which are ordinary-looking flies, lay eggs on wounds or scratches in the hide of cattle; the larvae that hatch burrow into the flesh, sometimes eating the poor beasts alive. Since screw worms breed in wild animals as well as in tame ones, they are almost immune to extermination.

"After pondering the problem, Entomologist E. F. Knipling, U.S. D.A., had an idea. The male flies, he mused, hunt and catch the females with singleminded enthusiasm. Why not draft the males into the extermination service?

"So Knipling and his assistants raised screw worm flies and exposed them to X-rays. The flies suffered no obvious ill effects and were as successful as unexposed

males in the pursuit of females. The difference was that the X-rayed males were sterile. This meant that every female with which one of them mated would lay infertile eggs for the rest of her life.

"So Knipling's Machiavellian scheme was given a preliminary tryout in Florida with good results. Then last year an entomological task force invaded the Dutch island of Curacao in the Caribbean, where screw worms were strongly in possession. Supplied by air with male flies raised in Florida (on blood and horse meat) and sterilized by gamma rays from Cobalt 60, the experimenters released them on the island at the rate of 400 males a week for each square mile.

"Results came quickly. Wounded goats exposed to the flies showed clusters of screw worm eggs, but many proved infertile. The females that laid the eggs had mated with sterilized males from Florida. After seven weeks, all eggs were infertile, and the screw worm population dropped toward the vanishing point. No eggs at all were collected after mid-October, and since November there have been no signs of screw worms on the island.

*(Continued on page 121)*

# MATRIX THE STRATEGY GAME

## BASED ON THE NEW THEORY OF GAMES

The Theory of Games is in the news! It has been revealed that top-level government planners use the Theory of Games to formulate basic policy. Economists find the Theory of Games an invaluable new tool. All branches of the military have revised their logistic and strategic concepts in the light of this new Theory. Workers in all branches of Science find that the Theory of Games provides new avenues of approach to unsolved problems and places new interpretations on existing data.

MATRIX, a simple and interesting game based on the Theory of Games, trains you to think subconsciously in the new logic of this Theory.

Two MATRIX players take turns placing their numbered markers. They could assemble a matrix that looks like the figure illustrated.

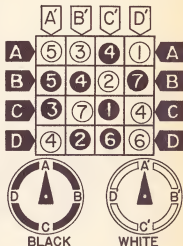
The player who placed the Black tiles selects a horizontal row on his indicator; the player who placed the white tiles selects a vertical column on his indicator. On the first play of this particular matrix, both players simultaneously reveal their indicators set as shown.

WHITE scores 5 points. If you were BLACK, in what proportion should you redistribute your choices among the rows A B C D to be sure of winning this particular game over a series of plays regardless of what WHITE may do?

After you have played several games of MATRIX by guesswork alone, you begin intuitively to solve problems such as the one illustrated above. Though MATRIX is a simple enough game for a child to play, a new factor rapidly becomes apparent. MATRIX is unique! In chess or checkers you plan your next move only after your opponent has made his move. In MATRIX, because both players reveal their choices simultaneously, you must think from two points of view at the same time! The new multi-valued logic inherent in the Theory of Games becomes a new thought habit as you use it in the concrete situations MATRIX provides. This fascinating game is a training aid to reach a higher order of thinking!

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MATRIX is an enjoyable game. It teaches fascinating new thought processes as it entertains. In the past only those with a knowledge of advanced mathematics have understood this method of statistical inference. Now, with MATRIX, you too can add this valuable new tool to your powers of analysis.



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PART 1 OF A 4-PART SERIAL

**T**HE LINER from Port Lyautey was comfortable and slick, but I was leaning forward in my seat as we came in over Naples. I had been on edge all the way across the Atlantic. Now as the steward came through the compartments to pick up our Blue Plate ration

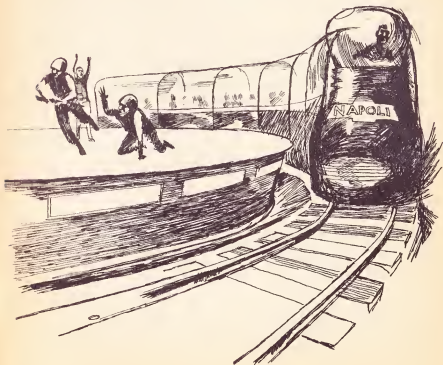
coupons for the trip, I couldn't help feeling annoyed that I hadn't eaten the food they represented. For the Company wanted everyone to get the fullest possible benefit out of his policies — not only the food policies, but Blue Blanket, Blue Bolt and all the others.

# PREFERRED RISK

By **EDSON McCANN**

*Winner of the \$6,500 Galaxy-Simon & Schuster novel contest, this taut suspense story asks the challenging question: how dangerous would it be to live in a rigidly risk-free world?*

Illustrated by **KOSSIN**



We *whooshed* in to a landing at Carmody Field, just outside of Naples. My baggage was checked through, so I didn't expect to have any difficulty clearing past the truce-team Customs inspectors. It was only a matter of turning over my baggage checks, and boarding the *rapido* that would take me into Naples.

But my luck was low. The man before me was a fussbudget who insisted on carrying his own bags, and I had to stand behind him a quarter of an hour, while the truce-teams geigered his socks and pajamas.

While I fidgeted, though, I noticed that the Customs shed had, high up on one wall, a heroic-sized bust of Millen Carmody himself. Just standing there, under that benevolent smile, made me feel better. I even managed to nod politely to the traveler ahead of me as he finally got through the gate and let me step up to the uniformed Company expediter who checked my baggage tickets.

And the expediter gave me an unexpected thrill. He leafed through my papers, then stepped back and gave me a sharp military salute. "Proceed, Adjuster Wills," he said, returning my travel orders. It hadn't been like that at the transfer point at Port Lyautey — not even back at the

Home Office in New York. But here we were in Naples, and the little war was not yet forgotten; we were under Company law, and I was an officer of the Company.

It was all I needed to restore my tranquility. But it didn't last.

THE *rapido* took us through lovely Italian countryside, but it was in no hurry to do it. We were late getting into the city itself, and I found myself almost trotting out of the little train and up into the main waiting room where my driver would be standing at the Company desk.

I couldn't really blame the Neapolitans for the delay — it wasn't their fault that the Sicilians had atomized the main passenger field at Capodichino during the war, and the *rapido* wasn't geared to handling that volume of traffic from Carmody Field. But Mr. Gogarty would be waiting for me, and it wasn't my business to keep a Regional Director waiting.

I got as far as the exit to the train shed. There was a sudden high, shrill blast of whistles and a scurrying and, out of the confusion of persons milling about, there suddenly emerged order.

At every doorway stood three uniformed Company expediters; squads of expediters formed almost before my eyes all over the

train shed; single expediters appeared and took up guard positions at every stairwell and platform head. It was a triumph of organization; in no more than ten seconds, a confused crowd was brought under instant control.

But why?

There was a babble of surprised sounds from the hurrying crowds; they were as astonished as I. It was reasonable enough that the Company's expediter command should conduct this sort of surprise raid from time to time, of course. The Company owed it to its policyholders; by insuring them against the hazards of war under the Blue Bolt complex of plans, it had taken on the responsibility of preventing war when it could. And ordinarily it could, easily enough.

How could men fight a war without weapons — and how could they buy weapons, particularly atomic weapons, when the Company owned all the sources and sold only to whom it pleased, when it pleased, as it pleased? There were still occasional outbreaks — witness the recent strife between Sicily and Naples itself — but the principle remained. . . Anyway, surprise raids were well within the Company's rights.

I was mystified, though — I

could not imagine what they were looking for here in the Naples railroad terminal; with geigering at Carmody Field and every other entry point to the Principality of Naples, they should have caught every fissionable atom coming in, and it simply did not seem reasonable that anyone in the principality itself could produce nuclear fuel to make a bomb.

Unless they were not looking for bombs, but for people who might want to use them. But that didn't tie in with what I had been taught as a cadet at the Home Office.

**T**HERE was a crackle and an unrecognizable roar from the station's public-address system. Then the crowd noises died down as people strained to listen, and I began to understand the words: "... Where you are in an orderly fashion until this investigation is concluded. You will not be delayed more than a few minutes. Do not, repeat, *do not* attempt to leave until this man has been captured. Attention! Attention! All persons in this area! Under Company law, you are ordered to stop all activities and stand still at once. An investigation is being carried out in this building. All persons will stand still and remain where you are in an

orderly fashion until this investigation . . ."

The mounting babble drowned the speaker out again, but I had heard enough.

I suppose I was wrong, but I had been taught that my duty was to serve the world, by serving the Company, in all ways at all times. I walked briskly toward the nearest squad of expeditors, who were already breaking up into detachments and moving about among the halted knots of civilians, peering at faces, asking questions.

I didn't quite make it; I hadn't gone more than five yards when a heavy hand fell on my shoulder, and a harsh voice snarled in the Neapolitan dialect, "Halt, you! Didn't you hear the orders?"

I spun, staggering slightly, to face an armed expeditor-officer. I stood at attention and said crisply, "Sorry. I'm Thomas Wills, Claims Adjuster. I thought I might be able to help."

The officer stared at me for a moment. His cheeks moved; I had the impression that, under other circumstances, he would have spat on the floor at my feet. "Papers!" he ordered.

I passed him my travel orders. He looked them over briefly, then returned them. Like the Customs expeditor at Carmody Field, he gave me a snap salute, militarily

precise and, in a way I could not quite define, contemptuous. "You should just stay here, Adjuster Wills," he advised — in a tone that made it a command. "This will be over in a moment."

He was gone, back to his post. I stood for a moment, but it was easier to listen to his orders than to obey them; the Neapolitan crowd didn't seem to take too well to discipline, and though there was no overt resistance to the search squads, there was a sort of Brownian movement of individuals in the throng that kept edging me back and away from where I had been standing. It made me a little uncomfortable; I was standing close to the edge of a platform, and a large poster announced that the Milan Express was due to arrive on that track at any moment. In fact, I could hear the thin, effeminate whistle of its Diesel locomotive just beyond the end of the platform. I tried to inch my way from the edge. I dodged around an electric baggage-cart, and trod heavily on someone's foot.

"EXCUSE me," I said quickly, looking at the man. He glared back at me. There was a bright spark in his eyes; I could tell little about his expression because, oddly enough in that country of clean-shaven faces, he wore

a heavy, ragged, clipped beard. He wore the uniform of a porter. He mumbled something I could not quite catch, and moved as if to push me away. I suppose I put up my arm. My papers, with the Company seal bright gold upon them, were still in my hand, and the bearded man caught sight of them.

If there had been anger in his eyes before, there was now raging fury. He shrielled, "Beast! Animal!" He thrust at me blindly and leaped past me, out of the shelter of the bags; he went spinning furiously through the crowd, men and women ricocheting off him.

I heard a harsh bellow: "There he goes! Zorch! Zorch!" And I could hear the bearded man shrieking curses as he hurtled up the platform, up toward the oncoming train, over to the edge — and off the platform to the tracks!

He fell less than a yard in front of the slim nose of the Diesel. I don't suppose the speed of the train was even five miles an hour, but the engineer hadn't a chance in the world to stop.

While I watched, struck motionless, along with all the others on that platform, the engine passed over the huddled form. The brakes were shrieking, but it was much, much too late. Even in that moment I thought he

would not be killed — not instantly, at least, unless he died of loss of blood. The trunk of his body was safely in the well between the tracks. But his legs were sprawled over a rail. And the slow click-click of the wheels didn't stop until his uniformed body was far out of sight.

It was shocking, sickening, unbelievable.

And it didn't stop there. A strange thing happened. When the man had dived into the path of the train, there was a sudden fearful hush; it had happened too suddenly for anyone to cry out. And when the hush ended, there was only a momentary, instinctive gasp of horror. Then there was a quick, astonished babble of voices — and then cheers! And applause, and ringing bravos!

I didn't understand.

The man had thrown himself deliberately under the train. I was sure of it.

Was that something to cheer?

I finally made it to where the Regional Director was waiting for me — nearly an hour late.

It was at a hotel overlooking the Bay, and the sight was thrilling enough to put the unpleasant accident I had seen out of my mind for a moment. There was nothing so beautiful in all the world, I thought, as the Bay of

Naples at sunset. It was not only my own opinion; I had seen it described many times in the travel folders I had pored over, while my wife indulgently looked over my shoulder, back in those remote days of marriage. "La prima vista del mundo," the folders had called it — the most beautiful sight of the world. They had said: "See Naples, and die."

I hadn't known, of course, that Marianna would die first. . .

But that was all behind me. After Marianna's death, a lot of things had happened, all in a short time, and some of them very bad. But good or bad, I had laid down a law for myself: I would not dwell on them. I had started on a new life, and I was going to put the past in a locked compartment in my mind. I had to!

I was no longer an ordinary civilian, scraping together his Blue Heaven premiums for the sake of a roof over his head, budgeting his food policies, carrying on his humdrum little job. I was a servant of the human race and a member of the last surviving group of gentleman-adventurers in all the world: I was an Insurance Claims Adjuster for the Company!

All the same, I couldn't quite forget some of the bad things that had happened, as I walked into

the hotel dining room to meet the Regional Director.

**R**EGIONAL Director Gogarty was a huge, pale balloon of a man. He was waiting for me at a table set for four. As he greeted me, his expression was sour. "Glad to meet you, Wills. Bad business, this. Bad business. He got away with it again."

I coughed. "Sir?" I asked.

"Zorchi!" he snapped. And I remembered the name I had heard on the platform. The madman! "Zorchi, Luigi Zorchi, the human jellyfish. Wills, do you know that that man has just cashed in on his *twelfth* disability policy? And not a thing we could do to stop him! You were there. You saw it, didn't you?"

"Well, yes, but —"

"Thought so. The *twelfth*! And your driver said on the phone it was both legs this time. Both legs — and on a common carrier. Double indemnity!" He shook his enormous head. "And with a whole corps of expeditors standing by to stop him!"

I said with some difficulty, "Sir, do you mean that the man I saw run over by the train was —"

"Luigi Zorchi. That's who he was. Ever hear of him, Wills?"

"Can't say I have."

Gogarty nodded his balloon-like head. "The Company has

kept it out of the papers, of course, but you can't keep anything from being gossiped about around here. This Zorchi is practically a national hero in Naples. He's damn near a millionaire by now, I guess, and every lira of it has come right out of the Company's indemnity funds. And do you think we can do anything about it? Not a thing! Not even when we're tipped off ahead of time — when, what, and where!

"He just laughs at us. I know for a fact," Gogarty said bitterly, "that Zorchi knew we found out he was going to dive in front of that express tonight. He was just daring us to stop him. We should have! We should have figured he might disguise himself as a porter. We should —"

I interrupted, "Mr. Gogarty, are you trying to tell me this man *deliberately* maims himself for the accident insurance?" Gogarty nodded sourly. "Good heavens," I cried, "that's disloyal!"

Gogarty laughed sharply and brought me up standing. There was a note to the way he laughed that I didn't like; for a moment there, I thought he was thinking of my own little — well, indiscretion. But he said only, "It's expensive, too." I suppose he meant nothing by it. But I was sensitive on the subject.

Before I could ask him any

more questions, the massive face smoothed out in a smile. He rose ponderously, greeting someone. "Here they are, Wills," he said jovially. "The girls!"

THE headwaiter was conducting two young ladies toward us. I remembered my manners and stood up, but I confess I was surprised. I had heard that discipline in the field wasn't the same as at the Home Office, but after all — Gogarty was a Regional Director!

It was a little informal of him to arrange our first meeting at dinner, in the first place. But to make a social occasion of it was — in the straitlaced terms of the Home Office where I had been trained — almost unthinkable.

And it was apparent that the girls were mere decoration. I had a hundred eager questions to ask Gogarty — about this mad Zorchi, about my duties, about Company policy here in the principality of Naples — but it would be far out of line to bring up Company matters with these females present. I was not pleased, but I managed to be civil.

The girls were decorative enough, I had to admit.

Gogarty said expansively, all trace of ill humor gone, "This is Signorina dell'Angela and Miss Susan Manchester. Rena and



Susan, this is Tom Wills."

I said stiffly, "Delighted."

Susan was the blonde one, a small plump girl with the bubbly smile of a professional model. She greeted Gogarty affectionately. The other was dark and lovely, but with a constant shadow, almost glowering, in her eyes.

So we had a few drinks. Then we had a few more. Then the captain appeared with a broad menu, and I found myself in an embarrassing position. For Gogarty waved the menu aside with a gesture of mock disgust. "Save it for the peasants," he ordered. "We don't want that Blue Plate slop. We'll start with those little baby shrimps like I had last night, and then an antipasto and after that —"

I broke in apologetically, "Mr. Gogarty, I have only a Class-B policy."

Gogarty blinked at me. "What?"

I cleared my throat. "I have only Class-B coverage on my Blue Plate policy," I repeated. "I, uh, I never went in much for such —"

He looked at me incredulously. "Boy," he said, "this is on the Company. Now relax and let me order. Blue Plate coverage is for the peasants; I eat like a human being."

It shook me a little. Here was

a Regional Director talking about the rations supplied under the Company's Blue Plate coverage as "slop." Oh, I wasn't naive enough to think that no one talked that way. There were a certain number of malcontents anywhere. I'd heard that kind of talk, and even worse, once in a while from the Class-D near-uninsurables, the soreheads with a grudge against the world who blamed all their troubles on the Company and bleated about the "good old days." Mostly they did their bleating when it was premium time, I'd noticed.

But I certainly never expected it from Gogarty.

Still — it was his party. And he seemed like a pretty nice guy. I had to allow him the defects of his virtues, I decided. If he was less reverent to the Company than he should have been, at least by the same token he was friendly and democratic. He had at least twenty years seniority on me, and back at the Home Office a mere Claims Adjuster wouldn't have been at the same table with a Regional Director.

And here he was feeding me better than I had ever eaten in my life, talking as though we were equals, even (I reminded myself) seeing to it that we had the young ladies to keep us company.

**WE WERE** hours at dinner, hours and endless glasses of wine, and we talked continually. But the conversation never came close to official business.

The girl Rena was comfortable to be with, I found. There was that deep, eternal sadness in her eyes, and every once in a while I came up against it in the middle of a laugh; but she was soft-voiced and pleasant, and undeniably lovely. Marianna had been prettier, I thought, but Marianna's voice was harsh Midwest while Rena's —

I stopped myself.

When we were on our after-dinner liqueurs, Rena excused herself for a moment and, after a few minutes, I spotted her standing by a satin-draped window, looking wistfully out over a balcony. Gogarty winked.

I got up and, a little unsteadily, went over to her. "Shall we look at this more closely?" I asked her. She smiled and we stepped outside.

Again I was looking down on the Bay of Naples — a scene painted in moonlight this time, instead of the orange hues of sunset. It was warm, but the Moon was frosty white in the sky. Even its muddled reflection in the slagged waters was grayish white, not yellow. There was a pale orange halo over the crater of

Mount Vesuvius, to our left; and far down the coast a bluish phosphorescence, over the horizon, marked Pompeii. "Beautiful," I said.

She looked at me strangely. All she said was, "Let's go back inside."

Gogarty greeted us. "Looking at the debris?" he demanded jovially. "Not much to see at night. Cheer up, Tom. You'll see all the damage you want to see over the next few days."

I said, "I hope so, sir."

Gogarty shook his head reprovingly. "Not 'sir,' Tom. Save that for the office. Call me Sam." He beamed. "You want to know what it was like here during the war? You can ask the girls. They were here all through. Especially Susan — she was with the Company's branch here, even before I took over. Right, Susan?"

"Right, Sam," she said obediently.

Gogarty nodded. "Not that Rena missed much either, but she was out of town when the Sicilians came over. Weren't you?" he demanded, curiously intent. Rena nodded silently. "Naples sure took a pasting," Gogarty went on. "It was pretty tough for a while. Did you know that the Sicilians actually made a landing right down the coast at Pompeii?"

"I saw the radioactivity," I said.

"That's right. They got clobbered, all right. Soon's the barges were in, the Neapolitans let them have it. But it cost them. The Company only allowed them five A-bombs each, and they had to use two more to knock out Palermo. And — well, they don't like to tell this on themselves, but one of the others was a dud. Probably the only dud A-bomb in history, I guess."

He grinned at Rena. Astonishingly, Rena smiled back.

She was, I thought, a girl of many astonishing moments; I had not thought that she would be amused at Gogarty's heavy-handed needling.

GOGARTY went on and on. I was interested enough — I had followed the Naples-Sicily war in the papers and, of course, I'd been briefed at the Home Office before coming over — but the girls seemed to find it pretty dull. By the time Gogarty finished telling me about the Sicilian attempt to trigger Mt. Vesuvius by dropping an A-bomb into its crater, Rena was frankly bored and even Susan was yawning behind her palm.

We finally wound up under the marquee of the restaurant. Gogarty and the blonde politely

said good night, and disappeared into a cab. It was clearly up to me to take Rena home.

I hailed a cab. When I made up my new insurance schedule at the Home Office before coming over, I splurged heavily on transportation coverage. Perhaps I was making up for the luxuries of travel that life with Marianna hadn't allowed me. Anyway, I'd taken out Class AA policies. And as the cab driver clipped my coupons he was extremely polite.

Rena lived a long way from the hotel. I tried to make small talk, but she seemed to have something on her mind. I was in the middle of telling her about the terrible "accident" I had seen that evening at the station — suitably censored, of course — when I observed she was staring out the window.

She hadn't been paying attention while I talked, but she noticed the silence when I stopped. She gave a little shake of the head and looked at me. "I'm sorry, Mr. Wills," she said. "I am being rude."

"Not at all," I said gallantly.

"Yes." She nodded and smiled, but it was a thoughtful, almost a sad, smile. "You are too polite, you gentlemen of the Company. Is that part of your training?"

"It's easy to be polite to you,

Miss dell'Angela," I said by rote. Yes, it was part of our training: *A Claims Adjuster is always courteous.* But what I said was true enough, all the same. She was a girl that I enjoyed being polite to.

"No, truly," she persisted. "You are an important officer in the Company, and you must have trained long for the post. What did they teach you?"

"Well —" I hesitated — "just the sort of thing you'd expect, I guess. A little statistical mathematics — enough so we can understand what the actuaries mean. Company policies, business methods, administration. Then, naturally, we had a lot of morale sessions. A Claims Adjuster —" I cleared my throat, feeling a little self-conscious — "a Claims Adjuster is supposed to be like Caesar's wife, you know. He must always set an example to his staff and to the public. I guess that sounds pretty stuffy. I don't mean it to be. But there is a lot of emphasis on tradition and honor and discipline."

She asked, rather oddly, "And is there a course in loyalty?"

"Why, I suppose you might say that. There are ceremonies, you know. And it's a matter of cadet honor to put the Company ahead of personal affairs."

"AND do all Claims Adjusters live by this code?"

For a moment I couldn't answer. It was like a blow in the face. I turned sharply to look at her, but there was no expression on her face, only a mild polite curiosity.

I said with difficulty, "Miss dell'Angela, what are you getting at?"

"Why, nothing!" Her face was as angelic as her name.

"I don't know what you mean or what you may have heard about me, Miss dell'Angela, but I can tell you this, if you are interested. When my wife died, I went to pieces. I admit it. I said a lot of things I shouldn't have, and some of them may have reflected against the Company. I'm not trying to deny that but, you understand, I was upset at the time. I'm not upset now." I took a deep breath. "To me, the Company is the savior of humanity. I don't want to sound like a fanatic, but I am loyal to the Company, to the extent of putting it ahead of my personal affairs, to the extent of doing whatever job the Company assigns to me. And, if necessary, to the extent of dying for it if I have to. Is that clear?"

Well, that was a conversation-stopper, of course. I hadn't meant

to get all wound up about it, but it hurt to find out that there had been gossip. The dell'Angela girl merely said: "Quite clear."

We rode in silence for a while. She was staring out the window again, and I didn't especially want to talk just then. Maybe I was too sensitive. But there was no doubt in my mind that the Company was the white hope of the world, and I didn't like being branded a traitor because of what I'd said after Marianna died. I was, in a way, paying the penalty for it — it had been made pretty clear to me that I was on probation. That was enough.

As I said, she lived a long way from the Gran Reale. I had plenty of time for my flare-up, and for brooding, and for getting over it.

But we never did get around to much idle conversation on that little trip. By the time I had simmered down, I began to have disturbing thoughts. It suddenly occurred to me that I was a man, and she was a girl, and we were riding in a cab.

I don't know how else to say it. At one moment I was taking her home from a dinner; and at the next, I was taking her home from a date. Nothing had changed — except the way I looked at it.

ALL OF a sudden, I began to feel as though I were fourteen years old again. It had been quite a long time since I had had the duty of escorting a beautiful girl — and by then I realized this was a really *beautiful* girl — home at the end of an evening. And I was faced with the question that I had thought would never bother me again at least a decade before. Should I kiss her good night?

It was a problem, and I thought about it, feeling a little foolish but rather happy about it. But all my thinking came to nothing. She decided for me.

The cab stopped in front of a white stucco wall. Like so many of the better Italian homes, the wall enclosed a garden, and the house was in the middle of the garden. It was an attractive enough place — Class A at least, I thought — though it was hard to tell in the moonlight.

I cleared my throat and sort of halfway leaned over to her.

Then she turned and was looking up at me, and the moonlight glinted brightly off what could only have been tears in her eyes.

I stared.

She didn't say a word. She shook her head briefly, opened the door and was gone behind the gate.

It was a puzzlement. Why had

she been crying? What had I done?

I reviewed my conduct all the way back to the hotel, but nothing much came of it. Perhaps I had been brusque — but brusque enough to bring tears? I couldn't believe it.

Curious new life! I fell asleep with the pale moon shining in the window, brooding about the life I was just beginning, and about the old life behind me that was buried in the same grave with Marianna.

## II

THE Naples branch of the Company lay in the heart of the city. I took a cab to a sort of dome-roofed thing called a *galleria*, and walked under its skeletal steel ceiling to my new office. Once the *galleria* had been roofed with glass, but the glass had powdered down from the concussion of the Mt. Vesuvius bomb, or the Capodichino bomb, or one of the other hammerblows the Sicilians had rained on the principality of Naples in the recent unpleasantness.

I entered the office and looked around. The blonde girl named Susan appeared to double as the office receptionist. She nodded efficiently and waved me to a fenced-off enclosure where Sam

Gogarty sat, plump and untroubled, at an enormous desk.

I pushed open the swinging gate.

Gogarty looked at me icily. "You're late," he said.

He had no hangover, it was clear. I said apologetically, "Sorry, I'm —"

"Never mind. Just don't let it happen again." It was clear that, in the office, business was business; the fact that we had been drinking together the night before would not condone liberties the morning after. Gogarty said, "Your desk is over there, Wills. Better get started."

I felt considerably deflated as I sat down at my desk and stared unhappily at the piles of blue and yellow manifolds before me.

The Company had trained me well. I didn't need to be coached in order to get through the work; it was all a matter of following established techniques and precedents. I checked the coverage, reduced the claim to tape-code, fed the tapes into a machine.

If the claim was legitimate, the machine computed the amounts due and issued a punch-card check. If there was anything wrong, the machine flashed a red light and spat the faulty claim out into a hopper.

And there were plenty of claims. Every adult in Naples, of

course, carried the conventional War-and-Disaster policy — the so-called Blue Bolt coverage. Since few of them had actually been injured in the war, the claims were small — mostly for cost of premiums on other policies, under the disability clauses. (For if war prevented a policyholder from meeting his Blue Plate premiums, for instance, the Company itself under Blue Bolt would keep his policies paid — and the policyholder fed.)

But there were some big claims, too. The Neapolitan government had carried the conventional Blue Bolt policies and, though the policy had been canceled by the Company before hostilities broke out—thus relieving the Company of the necessity of paying damages to the principality of Naples itself — still there were all the subsidiary loss and damage claims of the Neapolitan government's bureaux and departments, almost every one of them non-canceling.

It amounted to billions and billions of lire. Just looking at the amounts on some of the vouchers before me made my head swim. And the same, of course, would be true in Sicily. Though that would naturally be handled by the Sicilian office, not by us.

However, the cost of this one

brief, meager little war between Naples and Sicily, with less than ten thousand casualties, lasting hardly more than a week, must have set the Company's reserves back hundreds of millions of dollars.

And to think that some people didn't like the Company! Why, without it, the whole peninsula of Italy would have been in financial ruin, the solvent areas dragged down with the combatants!

Naturally, the Regional Office was understaffed for this volume of work — which is why they had flown in new Adjusters like myself.

I LOOKED up from my desk, surprised. Susan was standing next to me, an aspirin and a paper cup of water in her hand. "You look like you might need this," she whispered. She winked and was gone.

I swallowed it gratefully, although my hangover was almost gone. I was finding in these dry papers all the romance and excitement I had joined the Company's foreign service for. Here before me were human lives, drama, tragedy, even an occasional touch of human-interest comedy.

For the Company was supporting most of Naples and whatever

affected a Neapolitan life showed up somehow in the records of the Company.

It was a clean, *dedicated* feeling to work for the Company. The monks of the Middle Ages might have had something of the same positive conviction that their work in the service of a mighty churchly empire was right and just, but surely no one since.

I attacked the mountain of forms with determination, taking pleasure in the knowledge that every one I processed meant one life helped by the Company.

It was plain in history, for all to see. Once the world had been turbulent and distressed, and the Company had smoothed it out. It had started with fires and disease. When the first primitive insurance companies — there were more than one, in the early days — began offering protection against the hazards of fire, they had found it wise to try to prevent fires. There were the advertising campaigns with their wistful-eyed bears pleading with smokers not to drop their lighted cigarettes in the dry forest; the technical bureaus like the Underwriter's Laboratory, testing electrical equipment, devising intricate and homely gimmicks like the underwriter's knot; the Fire Patrol in the big cities that followed up the city-owned Fire De-

partment; the endless educational sessions in the schools. . . And fires decreased.

Then there was life insurance. Each time a death benefit was paid, a digit rang up on the actuarial scoreboard. Was tuberculosis a major killer? Establish mobile chest X-rays; alert the people to the meaning of a chronic cough. Was it heart disease? Explain the dangers of overweight, the idiocy of exercise past forty. People lived longer.

Health insurance followed the same pattern. It had begun by paying for bills incurred during sickness, and ended by providing full medical sickness prevention and treatment for all. Elaborate research programs reduced the danger of disease to nearly nothing. Only a few rare cases, like that of Marianna. . .

I shook myself away from the thought. Anyway, it was neither fire nor health insurance that concerned me now, but the Blue Bolt anti-war complex of the Company's policies. It was easy enough to see how it had come about. For with fire and accident and disease ameliorated by the strong protecting hand of the Company, only one major hazard remained — war.

And so the Company had logically and inevitably resolved to wipe out war.



I LOOKED up. It was Susan again, this time with a cardboard container of coffee.

"You're an angel," I said. She set the coffee down and turned to go. I looked quickly around to make sure that Gogarty was busy, and stopped her. "Tell me something?"

"Sure."

"About this girl, Rena. Does she work for the Company?"

Susan giggled. "Heavens, no. What an idea!"

"What's so strange about it?"

She straightened out her face. "You'd better ask Sam — Mr. Gogarty, that is. Didn't you have a chance to talk to her last night? Or were you too busy with other things?"

"I only want to know how she happened to be with you."

Susan shrugged. "Sam thought you'd like to meet her, I guess. Really, you'll have to ask him. All I know is that she's been in here quite a lot about some claims. But she doesn't work here, believe me." She wrinkled her nose in amusement. "And I won't work here either, if I don't get back to my desk."

I took the hint. By lunch time, I had got through a good half of the accumulation on my desk. I ate briefly and not too well at a nearby *trattoria* with a "B" on the Blue Plate medallion in its

window. After the dinner of the night before, I more than half agreed with Gogarty's comments about the Blue Plate menus.

Gogarty called me over when I got back to the office. He said, "I haven't had a chance to talk to you about Luigi Zorchi."

I nodded eagerly. I had been hoping for some explanations.

Gogarty went on, "Since you were on the scene when he took his dive, you might as well follow up. God knows you can't do worse than the rest of us."

I said dubiously, "Well, I saw the accident, if that's what you mean."

"Accident! What accident? This is the twelfth time he's done it, I tell you." He tossed a file folder at me. "Take a look! Loss of limbs — four times. Internal injuries — six times. Loss of vision, impaired hearing, hospitalization and so on — good lord, I can't count the number of separate claims. And, every one, he has collected on. Go ahead, look it over."

I PEERED at the folder. The top sheet was a field report on the incident I had watched, when the locomotive of the Milan express had severed both legs. The one below it, dated five weeks earlier, was for flash burns suffered in the explosion of a stove,

causing the loss of the right forearm nearly to the elbow.

Curious, I thought, I hadn't noticed anything when I saw the man on the platform. Still, I hadn't paid too much attention to him at first, and modern prosthetic devices were nearly miraculous. I riffled through the red-bordered sheets. The fifth claim down, nearly two years before, was —

I yelped, "Mr. Gogarty! This is a fraud!"

"What?"

"Look at this! 'On 21st October, the insured suffered severe injuries while trapped in a rising elevator with faulty safety equipment, resulting in loss of both legs above knees, multiple lacerations of —' Well, never mind the rest of it. But look at that, Mr. Gogarty! He already lost both legs! He can't lose them twice, can he?"

Gogarty sat back in his chair, looking at me oddly. "You startled me," he complained. "Wills, what have I been trying to tell you? That's the whole point, boy! No, he didn't lose his legs twice. It was *five times!*"

I goggled at him. "But —"

"But, but. But he did. Wait a minute —" he held up a hand to stop my questions — "just take a look through the folder. See for yourself." He waited while, in-

credulously, I finished going through the dossier. It was true. I looked at Gogarty wordlessly.

He said resentfully, "You see what we're up against? And none of the things you are about to say would help. There is no mistake in the records — they've been double and triple-checked. There is no possibility that another man, or men, substituted for Zorch — fingerprints have checked every time. The three times he lost his arms, retina-prints checked. There is no possibility that the doctors were bribed, or that he lost a little bit more of his leg, for instance, in each accident — the severed sections were recovered, and they were complete. Wills, *this guy grows new arms and legs like a crab!*"

I looked at him in a daze. "What a fantastic scientific discovery!" I said.

**H**E SNORTED. "Fantastic pain in the neck! Zorch can't go on like this; he'll bankrupt the Company. We can't stop him. Even when we were tipped off this time — we couldn't stop him. And I'll tell you true, Wills, that platform was loaded with our men when Zorch made his dive. You weren't the only Adjuster of the Company there."

He picked a folded sheet of

paper out of his desk. "Here. Zorchi is still in the hospital; no visitors allowed today. But I want you to take these credentials and go to see him tomorrow. You came to us with a high recommendation from the Home Office, Wills —" That made me look at him sharply, but his expression was innocent. "You're supposed to be a man of intelligence and resourcefulness. See if you can come up with some ideas on dealing with that situation. I'd handle it myself, but I've got —" he grimaced — "certain other minor administrative difficulties to deal with. Oh, nothing important, but you might as well know that there appears to be a little, well, popular underground resentment toward the Company around here."

"Incredible!" I said.

He looked at me thoughtfully for a moment. "Well," he said, "it's quitting time. See you in the morning."

I had a lonely dinner at the same cheap restaurant where I'd had my lunch. I spent an hour in my room with my Company-issued *Adjuster's Handbook*, looking for some precedent that had some sort of bearing on the case of a man who could grow new arms and legs. There wasn't anything, of course. I went out for a walk . . . and still it wasn't nearly

time for me to retire to bed.

So I did what I had been avoiding doing. I looked in the phone book for Rena dell'Angela's number. There was, it developed, a Benedetto dell'Angela at the address she'd given the cab driver; but the phone was disconnected.

So I wandered around some more, and then I went to sleep, dreaming about Benedetto dell'Angela. I saw him as a leather-faced, white-bearded and courtly old gentleman. Rena's father, surely. Possibly even her elder brother. Certainly not her husband.

It was a dull finish to the first full day of my rich, exciting new life. . .

THE "minor administrative difficulties" got major. So I didn't get to see Zorchi the next day, after all.

A Junior Adjuster named Hammond — he was easily sixty, but the slow-moving, unenterprising type that would stay junior till the day he died — came white-faced into the office a few minutes after opening and huddled with Gogarty for a quarter of an hour.

Then Gogarty called me over. He said, "We're having a spot of trouble. Hammond needs a little help; you're elected. Draw what

you need, take a couple of expeditors along, report back to me this evening."

Hammond and I stopped at the cashier's office to draw three dispatch-cases full of lira-notes. Outside, an armored car was waiting for us, with a full crew of six uniformed expeditors. We raced off down the narrow streets with the sirens wailing, climbing the long hill road past the radio-active remains of Capodichino, heading out toward the farmlands.

Hammond worriedly filled me in on the way. He had got in early to his branch office that morning, but no earlier than the first of a long line of policyholders. There had, it appeared, been some kind of rumor spread that the Company was running out of money. It was preposterous on the face of it — after all, who *printed* the money? — but you can't argue with a large group of people and, before the official hour of opening the branch, there were more than a hundred in the knotted line outside the door.

Hammond had rushed into the Naples office for help, leaving his staff to do the best they could. He said gloomily, staring out through the view-slits at the farmlands and vineyards we were passing through, "I just hope we still have a branch office. This is

a bad spot, Wills. Caserta. It got bombed out, you know; the whole southern end of the town is radio-active. And it has a long history of trouble. Used to be the summer royal seat of the old Italian monarchy; then the Americans used it for a command headquarters in the war Mussolini got into — the first atom war. It's been fought over time and again."

I said reasonably, "But don't they know the Company has all the resources in the world?"

"Sure they do — when they're thinking. Right now they're not thinking. They've got it in their heads that the Company isn't going to pay off. They're scared. You can't tell them anything. You can't even give them checks — they want cash on the line."

I said, "That's pretty silly, isn't it? I mean — ugh!" I retched, as I suddenly got a whiff of the most unpleasant and penetrating odor I had ever encountered in my life. It was like death and destruction in gaseous form; a sickly sweet, clinging stink that oozed in through the pores of my skin to turn my stomach. "Wow!" I said, gasping.

Hammond looked at me in bewilderment; then he grinned sourly. "New here, aren't you?" he inquired. "That's hemp. They grow the stuff for the fibers; and to get the fibers out, they let it

get good and rotten. You'll get used to it," he promised.

I tried. I tried pretty hard to get used to it; I hardly heard a word he said all the rest of the way in to Caserta, I was trying so hard. But I didn't get used to it.

**T**HEN I had my mind taken off my troubles. The branch was still doing business when we got there, though there were easily three or four hundred angrily shouting policyholders milling around in front of it. They scattered before us as the armored car came racing in; we skidded to a stop, siren blasting, and the expeditors leaped out with their weapons at the ready.

Hammond and I climbed out of the armored car with our bags of money. There was an audible excitement in the crowd as the word spread back that the Company had brought in enormous stores of lire, more than any man had ever seen, to pay off the claims. We could hear the chatter of many voices, and we almost could feel the tension slack off.

It looked like the trouble was over.

Then there was a shrill whistle. It sounded very much like the alarm whistle of one of our expeditors but, thinking back, I

have never been sure.

Perhaps it was a nervous expediter, perhaps it was an agent provocateur in the crowd. But, whoever pulled the trigger, the explosion went off.

There was a ragged yell from the crowd, and rocks began whizzing through the air. The pacifists in the mob began heading for the doorways and alleys around; women screamed, men shouted and bellowed, and for a moment it looked like we would be swamped. For not very many of them were pacifists, and there were at least a hundred screaming, gesticulating men lunging at us.

One cobblestone shattered the theoretically unbreakable windshield of the truck next to my head; then the expeditors, gas guns spitting, were ringing around us to protect the money.

It was a short fight but vicious. By the time the first assault was repulsed there were at least fifty persons lying motionless in the street.

I had never seen that sort of violence before. It did something to my stomach. I stood weaving, holding to the armored car, while the expeditors circled the area around the branch office, firing hurry-up shots at the running rioters. Hammond looked at me questioningly.

"That smell," I said apologetically.

He said only, "Sure." True, the fetid aroma from the hemp fields was billowing all around us, but he knew as well as I that it was not the smell that was bothering me.

In a few moments, as we were locking the bags of money into the office safe, red-crossed vehicles bearing the Company insignia appeared in the street outside, and medics began tending to the victims. Each one got a shot of something — an antidote to the sleep-gas from the expeditors' guns, I guessed — and was loaded unceremoniously into the ambulances.

Hammond appeared beside me. "Ready for business?" he asked. "They'll be back any minute now, the ones that can still walk. We'll be paying off until midnight, the way it looks."

I said, "Sure. That — that gas doesn't hurt them any, does it? I mean, after they go to the hospital they'll be all right, won't they?"

Hammond, twirling a pencil in his fingers, stared broodingly at the motionless body of one policyholder. He was a well-dressed man of fifty or so, with a reddish mustache, unusual in that area, and shattered rimless glasses. Not at all the type I would expect to

see in a street fight; probably, I thought, a typical innocent bystander.

Hammond said absently, "Oh, sure. They'll be all right. Never know what hit them." There was a tiny sharp *crack* and the two halves of the pencil fell to the floor. He looked at it in surprise. "Come on, Wills. Let's get to work."

### III

OF COURSE I still believed in the Company.

But all the same, it was the first time since I went to work for the Company that I had even had to ask myself that question.

That long, long day in Hammond's puny little branch office, sweltering in the smell of the hemp fields, pushing across the mountains of lire to the grim-faced policyholders left me a little less sure of things. Nearly all of the first hundred or so to pass my desk had been in the crowd that the expeditors had fired on. A few had fresh bandages to show where stones had missed the expeditors, but found targets all the same. Nearly all of them were hostile. There was no casual conversation, very few "*Grazies*" as they received their payments.

But at last the day was at an end. Hammond snapped an order

to one of the clerks, who shoved his way through the dwindling line to close the door and bang down the shutters. I put through the last few applications, and we were through.

It was hot and muggy out in the streets of New Caserta. Truce teams of expeditors were patrolling the square, taken off their regular assignments of enforcing the peace between Naples and Sicily to keep down Caserta's own mobs. Hammond suggested dinner, and we went to a little Blue Plate in the palace itself.

Hammond held Class-A food policies, but he was politeness itself; he voluntarily led the way to the Class-B area. We presented our policy-cards to the waiter for canceling, and sat back to enjoy the air conditioning.

I was still troubled over the violence. I said, "Has there been any trouble around here before?"

Hammond said ruefully, "Plenty. All over Europe, if you want my opinion. Of course, you never see it in the papers, but I've heard stories from field workers. They practically had a revolution in the Sudeten strip after the Prague-Vienna affair." He stopped talking as the waiter set his Meal-of-the-Day in front of him. Hammond looked at it sourly. "Oh, the hell with it, Wills,"

he said. "Have a drink with me to wash this stuff down."

**WE ORDERED** liquor, and Hammond shoved his Class-A card at the waiter. I am not a snoop, but I couldn't help noticing that the liquor coupons were nearly all gone; at his present rate, Hammond would use up his year's allotment by the end of the summer, and be paying cash for his drinks.

Dinner was dull. Hammond made it dull, because he was much more interested in his drinking than in me. Though I was never much of a drinker, I'd had a little experience in watching others tank up; Hammond I classified as the surly and silent type. He wasn't quite rude to me, but after the brandy with his coffee, and during the three or four straight whiskies that followed that, he hardly spoke to me at all.

We left the Blue Plate in a strained silence and, after the cooled restaurant, the heat outside was painful. The air was absolutely static, and the odor from the hemp fields soaked into our clothes like a bath in a sewer.

Overhead it was nearly dark, and there were low black clouds. "We'd better get going," I ventured. "Looks like rain."

Hammond said nothing, only grunted. He lurched ahead of me toward the narrow street that led back to the branch office, where our transport was waiting.

The distance was easily half a mile. Now I am not terribly lazy, and even in the heat I was willing enough to walk. But I didn't want to get caught in a rain. Maybe it was superstition on my part — I knew that the danger was really slight — but I couldn't forget that three separate atomic explosions had gone off in the area around Caserta and Naples within only a few months, and there was going to be a certain amount of radioactivity in every drop of rain that fell for a hundred miles around.

I started to tell Hammond about it, but he made a disgusted noise and stumbled ahead.

It wasn't as if we had to walk. Caserta was not well equipped with cabs, but there were a few; and both Hammond and myself ranked high enough in the Company to have been able to get a lift from one of the expediter cars that were cruising about.

There was a flare of lightning over the eastern mountains and, in a moment, the pounding roll of thunder. And a flat globule of rain splattered on my face.

I said, "Hammond, let's wait here for a lift."

Surprisingly he came along with me.

If he hadn't, I would have left him in the street.

**WE WERE** in a street of tenements. It was almost deserted; I rapped on the nearest door. No answer, no sound inside. I rapped again, then tried the door. It was locked.

The next door — ancient and rickety as the first — was also locked, and no one answered. The third door, no one answered. By then it was raining hard; the knob turned under my fingers, and we stepped inside.

We left the door ajar, on the chance that a squad car or cab might pass, and for light. It was almost dark outside, apart from the light from the lightning flashes, but even so it was darker within. There was no light at all in the narrow, odorous hall; not even a light seeping under the apartment doors.

In the lightning flare, Hammond's face was pale. He was beginning to sober up, and his manner was uneasy.

We were there perhaps half an hour in that silent hall, watching the rain sleet down and the lightning flare and listening to the thunder. Two or three times, squad cars passed, nosing slowly down the drenched streets, but



though Hammond looked longingly at them, I still didn't want to get wet.

Then the rain slowed and almost simultaneously a civilian cab appeared at the head of the block. "Come on," I said, tugging at his arm.

He balked. "Wait for a squad car," he mumbled.

"Why? Come on, Hammond, it may start to pour again in a minute."

"No!"

His behavior was exasperating me. Clearly it wasn't that he was too niggardly to pay for the cab; it was almost as if he were delaying going back to the branch office for some hidden reason. But that was ridiculous, of course.

I said, "Look, you can stay here if you want to, but I'm going." I jumped out of the doorway just in time to flag the cab; it rolled to a stop, and the driver backed to where I was standing. As I got in, I looked once more



to the doorway where Hammond was standing, his face unreadable.

He made a gesture of some sort, but the lightning flashed again and I skipped into the cab. When I looked again he was invisible inside the doorway, and

"Un momento, Signore 'Ammond!"

I stared at the man, a rather badly dressed Neapolitan. I said angrily, "Hammond isn't here!"

The man's expression changed. It had been belligerent; it now became astonished and apologetic.



I told the driver to take me to the branch office of the Company.

Curious; but it was not an end to curious things that night. At the branch office, my car was waiting to take me back to Naples.

I surrendered my travel coupons to the cab driver and jumped from one vehicle to the other.

Before my driver could start, someone appeared at the window of the car and a sharp voice said,

"A thousand times excuse me," he said. "The Signore 'Ammond, can you say where he is?"

I hesitated, but only for a moment. I didn't like the little man peering in my window, however humble and conciliatory he had become. I said abruptly, "No." And my driver took off, leaving the man standing there.

I turned to look back at him as we drove off.

It was ridiculous, but the way he was standing as we left, hold-

ing one hand in his pocket, eyes narrowed and thoughtful, made me think that he was carrying a gun.

But, of course, that was impossible. The Company didn't permit lethal weapons, and who in all the world would challenge a rule of the Company?

**W**HEN I showed up in the Naples office the next morning, Susan had my coffee ready and waiting for me. I said gratefully, "Bless you."

She chuckled. "That's not all," she said. "Here's something else you might like. Just remember though, if anyone asks, you got it out of the files yourself."

She slipped a folder under the piles of forms on my desk and disappeared. I peered at it curiously. It was labeled: "Policy BNT-3KT-890776, Blue Bolt Comprehensive. Insuree: Renata dell'Angela."

I could have been no more grateful had she given me the Company Mint.

But I had no chance to examine it. Gogarty was calling for me. I hastily swallowed my coffee and reported for orders.

They were simple enough. The appointment with Zorchi that I hadn't been able to keep the day before was set up for right then. I was already late and I had to

leave without another glance at Rena's file.

The hospital Zorchi honored with his patronage was a marble-halled palace on the cliffs that rimmed the southern edge of the Bay of Naples. It was a luxurious, rich man's hospital, stuffy with its opulence; but the most opulent of all was the plush-lined three-room suite where Zorchi was.

A white-robed sister of some religious order led me into a silent elevator and along a statued hall. She tapped on a door, and left me in the care of a sharp-faced young man with glasses who introduced himself as Mr. Zorchi's secretary.

I explained my business. He contemptuously waved me to a brocaded chair, and left me alone for a good half hour.

By the time Zorchi was ready to see me, I was boiling. Nobody could treat a representative of the Company like an errand boy! I did my best to take into consideration the fact that he had just undergone major surgery — first under the wheels of the train, then under the knives of three of Naples' finest surgeons.

I said as pleasantly as I could, "I'm glad to see you at last."

**T**HE dark face on the pink embroidered pillow turned coldly toward me. "Che volete?"

he demanded. The secretary opened his mouth to translate.

I said quickly, "Scusi; parlo un po' la lingua. Non bisogno un traduttore."

Zorchi said languidly in Italian, "In that case, Mario, you may go. What do you want with me, Weels?"

I explained my duties as a Claims Adjuster for the Company, pointing out that it was my task, indeed my privilege, to make settlement for injuries covered by Company policies. He listened condescendingly. I watched him carefully while I talked, trying to estimate the approach he might respond to if I was to win his confidence.

He was far from an attractive young man, I thought. No longer behind the shabby porter's uniform he had worn on the platform of the station, he still had an unkempt and slipshod appearance, despite the heavy silken dressing gown he wore and the manifest costliness of his room. The beard was still on his face; it, at least, had not been a disguise. It was not an attractive beard. It had been weeks, at the least, since any hand had trimmed it to shape and his hair was just as shaggy.

Zorchi was not impressed with my friendly words. When I had finished, he said coldly, "I have

had claims against the Company before, Weels. Why is it that this time you make speeches at me?"

I said carefully, "Well, you must admit you are a rather unusual case."

"Case?" He frowned fiercely. "I am no case, Weels. I am Zorchi, if you please."

"Of course, of course. I only mean to say that —"

"That I am a statistic, eh?" He bobbed his head. "Surely. I comprehend. But I am not a statistic, you see. Or, at best, I am a statistic which will not fit into your electronic machines, am I not?"

I admitted, "As I say, you are a rather unusual case—a rather unusual person, Mr. Zorchi."

He grinned coldly. "Good. We are agreed. Now that we have come to that understanding, are we finished with this interview?"

I coughed. "Mr. Zorchi, I'll be frank with you." He snorted, but I went on, "According to your records, this claim need not be paid. You see, you already have been paid for total disability, both a lump sum and a continuing settlement. There is no possibility of two claims for the loss of your legs, you must realize."

He looked at me with a touch of amusement. "I must?" he asked. "It is odd. I have discussed this, you understand, with many attorneys. The premiums were

paid, were they not? The language of the policy is clear, is it not? My legs — would you like to observe the stumps yourself?"

**H** E FLUNG the silken covers off. I averted my eyes from the white-banded lower half of his torso, hairy and scrawny and horribly *less* than a man's legs should be.

I said desperately, "Perhaps I spoke too freely. I do not mean, Mr. Zorchi, that we will not pay your claim. The Company *always* lives up to the letter of its contracts."

He covered himself casually. "Very well. Give the check to my secretary, please. Are you concluded?"

"Not quite." I swallowed. I plunged right in. "Mr. Zorchi, what the hell are you up to? How do you do it? There isn't any fraud, I admit it. You really lost your legs — more than once. You grew new ones. But how? Don't you realize how important this is? If you can do it, why not others? If you are in some way pecu — that is, if the structure of your body is in some way different from that of others, won't you help us find out how so that we can learn from it? It isn't necessary for you to live as you do, you know."

He was looking at me with a

hint of interest in his close-set, dull eyes. I continued, "Even if you can grow new legs, do you *enjoy* the pain of having them cut off? Have you ever stopped to think that some day, perhaps, you will miscalculate, and the wheels of the train, or the truck,



or whatever you use, may miss your legs and kill you? That's no way for a man to live, Mr. Zorchi. Why not talk freely to me, let me help you? Why not take the Company into your confidence, instead of living by fraud and deceit and —"

I had gone too far. Livid, he snarled, "Ass! That will cost your Company, I promise. Is it fraud for me to suffer like this? Do I enjoy it, do you think? Look, ass!" He flung the covers aside again, ripped at the white bandages with his hands — Blood



spurted. He uncovered the raw stumps and jerked them at me.

I do not believe any sight of my life shocked me as much as that; it was worse than the Caserta hemp fields, worse than the terrible gone moment when Marianna died, worse than anything I could imagine.

He raved, "See this fraud, look at it closely! Truly, I grow new legs, but does that make it easier to lose the old? It is the pain of being born, Weels, a pain you will never know! I grow legs, I grow arms, I grow eyes. I will never die! I will live on like a reptile or a fish."

His eyes were staring. Ignoring the blood spurting from his stumps, ignoring my attempts to say something, he pounded his abdomen. "Twelve times I have been cut — do you see even a scar? My appendix, it is bad; it traps filth, and the filth makes me sick. And I have it cut out — and it grows again; and I have it cut out again, and it grows back. And the pain, Weels, the pain never stops!" He flung the robe open, slapped his narrow, hairy chest.

I gasped. Under the scraggly hair was a rubble of boils and wens, breaking and matting the hair as he struck himself in frenzy. "Envy me, Weels!" he shouted. "Envy the man whose

body defends itself against everything! I will live forever, I promise it, and I will always be in pain, and someone will pay for every horrible moment of it! Now get out, get out!"

I left under the hating eyes of the sharp-faced secretary who silently led me to the door.

I HAD put Zorchi through a tantrum and subjected myself to as disagreeable a time as I'd ever had. And I hadn't accomplished a thing. I knew that well enough. And if I hadn't known it by myself, I would have found out.

Gogarty pointed it out to me, in detail. "You're a big disappointment to me," he moaned sourly. "Ah, the hell with it. What were you trying to accomplish, anyway?"

I said defensively, "I thought I might appeal to his altruism. After all, you didn't give me very explicit instructions."

"I didn't tell you to remember to wipe your nose either," he said bitterly. He shook his head, the anger disappearing. "Well," he said disconsolately, "I don't suppose we're any worse off than we were. I guess I'd better try this myself." He must have caught a hopeful anticipatory gleam in my eye, because he said quickly, "Not right now, Wills. You've

made that impossible. I'll just have to wait until he cools off."

I said nothing; just stood there waiting for him to let me go. I was sorry things hadn't worked out but, after all, he had very little to complain about. Besides, I wanted to get back to my desk and the folder about Rena dell'Angela. It wasn't so much that I was interested in her as a person, I reminded myself. I was just curious. . .

Once again, I had to stay curious for a while. Gogarty had other plans for me. Before I knew what was happening, I was on my way out of the office again, this time to visit another Neapolitan hospital, where some of the severely injured in the recent war were waiting final settlement of their claims. It was a hurry-up matter, which had been postponed too many times already; some of the injured urgently required major medical treatment, and the hospital was howling for approval of their claims before they'd begin treatment.

This one was far from a marble palace. It had the appearance of a stucco tenement, and all of the patients were in wards. I was a little surprised to see expeditors guarding the entrance.

I asked one of them, "Anything wrong?"

He looked at me with a flicker

of astonishment, recognizing the double-breasted Claim Adjuster uniform, surprised, I think, at my asking him a question. "Not as long as we're here, sir," he said.

"I mean, I was wondering what you were doing here."

The surprise became overt. "Vaults," he said succinctly.

**I** PRODDED no further. I knew what he meant by vaults, of course. It was part of the Company's beneficent plan for ameliorating the effects of even such tiny wars as the Naples-Sicily affair that those who suffered radiation burns got the best treatment possible. And the best treatment, of course, was suspended animation. The deadly danger of radiation burns lay in their cumulative effect; the first symptoms were nothing, the man was well and able to walk about. Degeneration of the system followed soon, the marrow of the bone gave up on its task of producing white corpuscles, the blood count dropped, the tiny radiant poisons in his blood spread and worked their havoc. If he could be gotten through the degenerative period he might live. But, if he lived, he would still die. That is, if his life processes continued, the radiation sickness would kill him. The answer was to stop the life process,



temporarily, by means of the injections and deep-freeze in the vaults. It was used for more than radiation, of course. Marianna, for instance —

Well, anyway, that was what the vaults were. These were undoubtedly just a sort of distribution point, where local cases were received and kept until they could be sent to the main Company vaults up the coast at Anzio.

I wasn't questioning the presence of vaults there; I was only curious why the Company felt they needed guarding.

I found myself so busy, though, that I had no time to think about it. A good many of the cases in this shabby hospital really needed the Company's help. But a great many of them were obvious attempts at fraud.

There was a woman, for instance, in the maternity ward. During the war, she'd had to hide out after the Capodichino bombing and hadn't been able to reach medical service. So her third child was going to be a girl, and she was asking indemnity under the gender-guarantee clause. But she had only Class-C coverage and her first two had been boys; a daughter was permissive in any of the first four pregnancies. She began swearing at me before I finished explaining these simple facts to her.

I walked out of the ward, hot under the collar. Didn't these people realize we were trying to help them? They didn't appear to be aware of it. Only the terribly injured, the radiation cases, the amputees, the ones under anesthetic — only these gave me no arguments, mainly because they couldn't talk.

**M**OST of them were on their way to the vaults, I found. My main job was revision of their policies to provide for immobilization. Inevitably, there are some people who will try to take advantage of anything.

The retirement clause in the basic contract was the joker here. Considering that the legal retirement age under the universal Blue Heaven policy was seventy-five years — calendar years, not metabolic years — there were plenty of invalids who wanted a few years in the vaults for reasons that had nothing to do with health. If they could sleep away two or three decades, they could, they thought, emerge at a physical age of forty or so and live idly off the Company the rest of their lives.

They naturally didn't stop to think that if any such practice became common the Company would simply be unable to pay claims. And they certainly didn't

think, or care that, if the Company went bankrupt, the world as we knew it would end.

It was a delicate problem; we couldn't deny them medical care, but we couldn't permit them the vaults unless they were either in clearly urgent need, or were willing to sign an extension waiver to their policies. . .

I saw plenty of that, that afternoon. The radiation cases were the worst, in that way, because they still could talk and argue. Even while they were being loaded with drugs, even while they could see with their own eyes the blood-count graph dipping lower and lower, they still complained at being asked to sign the waiver.

There was even some fear of the vaults themselves — though every living human had surely seen the Company's indoctrination films that showed how the injected drugs slowed life processes and inhibited the body's own destructive enzymes; how the apparently lifeless body, down to ambient air temperature, would be slipped into its hermetic plastic sack and stacked away, row on row, far underground, to sleep away the months or years or, if necessary, the centuries. Time meant nothing to the suspendees. It was hard to imagine being afraid of as simple and natural a process as that!

Although I had to admit that the vaults looked a lot like morgues. . .

I didn't enjoy it. I kept thinking of Marianna. She had feared the vaults too, in the childish, unreasoning, feminine way that was her characteristic. When the Blue Blanket technicians had turned up the diagnosis of leukemia, they had proposed the sure-thing course of putting her under suspension while the slow-acting drugs — specially treated to operate even under those conditions — worked their cure, but she had refused. There had been, they admitted, a ninety-nine and nine-tenths per cent prospect of a cure without suspension. . .

It just happened that Marianna was in the forlorn one-tenth that died.

I couldn't get her out of my mind. The cases who protested or whined or pleaded or shrieked that they were being tortured and embalmed alive didn't help. I was glad when the afternoon was over and I could get back to the office.

AS I came in the door, Gogarty was coming in, too, from the barbershop downstairs. He was freshly shaved and beaming.

"Quitting time, Tom," he said amiably, though his eyes were memorizing the pile of incom-

plete forms on my desk. "All work and no play, you know." He nudged me. "Not that you need reminding, eh? Still, you ought to tell your girl that she shouldn't call you on office time, Tom."

"Call me? Rena called me?"

He nodded absently, intent on the desk. "Against Company rules, you know. Say, I don't like to push you, but aren't you running a little behind here?"

I said with some irritation, "I don't have much chance to catch up, the way I've been racing around the country, you know. And there's plenty to be done."

He said soothingly, "Now, take it easy, Tom. I was only trying to say that there might be some easier way to handle these things." He speared a form, glanced over it casually. He frowned. "Take this, for instance. The claim is for catching cold as a result of exposure during the evacuation of Cerignola. What would you do with that one?"

"Why — pay it, I suppose."

"And put in the paper work? Suppose it's a phony, Tom? Not one case of coryza in fifty is genuine."

"What would you do?" I asked resentfully.

He said without hesitation, "Send it back with Form CBB-23A192. Ask for laboratory

smear-test reports."

I looked over the form. A long letter was attached; it said in more detail than was necessary that there had been no laboratory service during the brief war, at least where the policyholder happened to be, and therefore he could submit only the affidavits of three registered physicians. It looked like a fair claim to me. If it was up to me, I would have paid it automatically.

I temporized. "Suppose it's legitimate?"

"Suppose it is? Look at it this way, Tom. If it's phoney, this will scare him off, and you'd be saving the Company the expense and embarrassment of paying off a fraudulent claim. If it's legitimate, he'll resubmit it — at a time when, perhaps, we won't be so busy. Meanwhile that's one more claim handled and disposed of, for our progress reports to the Home Office."

I STARED at him unbelievingly. But he looked back in perfect calm, until my eyes dropped. After all, I thought, he was right in a way. The mountain of work on my desk was certainly a logjam, and it had to be broken somehow. Maybe rejecting this claim would work some small hardship in an individual case, but what about the hundreds and

thousands of others waiting for attention? Wasn't it true that no small hardship to an individual was as serious as delaying all those others?

It was, after all, that very solitude for the people at large that the Company relied on for its reputation — that, and the iron-clad guarantee of prompt and full settlement.

I said, "I suppose you're right."

He nodded, and turned away. Then he paused. "I didn't mean to bawl you out for that phone call, Tom," he said. "Just tell her about the rule, will you?"

"Sure. Oh, one thing." He waited. I coughed. "This girl, Rena. I don't know much about her, you know. Is she, well, someone you know?"

He said, "Heavens, no. She was making a pest out of herself around here, frankly. She has a claim, but not a very good one. I don't know all the details, because it's encoded, but the machines turned it down automatically. I do know that she, uh —" he sort of half winked — "wants a favor. Her old man is in trouble. I'll look it up for you some time, if you want, and get the details. I think he's in the cooler — that is, the clinic — up at Anzio."

He scratched his plump jowls. "I didn't think it was fair to you

for me to have a girl at dinner and none for you; Susan promised to bring someone along, and this one was right here, getting in the way. She said she liked Americans, so I told her you would be assigned to her case." This time he did wink. "No harm, of course. You certainly wouldn't be influenced by any, well, personal relationship, if you happened to get into one. Oh, a funny thing. She seemed to recognize your name."

*That was a jolt. "She what?"*

Gogarty shrugged. "Well, she reacted to it. 'Thomas Wills,' I said. She'd been acting pretty stand-offish, but she warmed up quick. Maybe she just likes the name, but right then is when she told me she liked Americans."

I cleared my throat. "Mr. Gogarty," I said determinedly, "please get me straight on something. You say this girl's father is in some kind of trouble, and you imply she knows me. I want to know if you've ever had any kind of report, or even heard any kind of rumor, that would make you think that I was in the least sympathetic to any anti-Company groups? I'm aware that there were stories —"

He stopped me. "I never heard any, Tom," he said definitely.

I hesitated. It seemed like a good time to open up to Gogarty;

I opened my mouth to start, but I was too late. Susan called him off for what she claimed was an urgent phone call and, feeling let-down, I watched him waddle away.

Because it was, after all, time that I took down my back hair with my boss.

WELL, I hadn't done anything too terribly bad — anyway, I hadn't *meant* to do anything bad. And the circumstances sort of explained it, in a way. And it was all in the past, and —

And nothing. I faced the facts. I had spent three solid weeks getting blind drunk, ranting and raving and staggering up to every passer-by who would listen and whining to him that the Company was evil, the Company was murderous, the Company had killed my wife.

There was no denying it. And I had capped it all off one bleary midnight, with a brick through the window of the Company branch office that served my home. It was only a drunken piece of idiocy, I kept telling myself. But it was a drunken piece of idiocy that landed me in jail, that had been permanently indorsed on every one of my policies, that was in the confidential pages of my Company service

record. It was a piece of idiocy that anyone might have done. But it would have meant deep trouble for me, if it hadn't been for the intercession of my wife's remote relative, Chief Underwriter Defoe.

It was he who had bailed me out. He had never told me how he had found out that I was in jail. He appeared, read the riot-act to me and got me out. He put me over the coals later, yes, but he'd bailed me out. He'd told me I was acting like a child — and convinced me of it, which was harder. And when he was convinced I had snapped out of it, he personally backed me for an appointment to the Company's school as a cadet Claims Adjuster.

I owed a considerable debt of gratitude to my ex-remote-in-law, Chief Underwriter Defoe.

WHILE I still was brooding, Gogarty came back. He looked unhappy. "Hammond," he said bitterly. "He's missing. Look, was he drunk when you left him last night?" I nodded. "Thought so. Never showed up for work. Not at his quarters. The daily ledger's still open at his office, because there's no responsible person to sign it. So naturally I've got to run out to Caserta now, and what Susan will say —"

He muttered away.

I remembered the file that was buried under the papers on my desk, when he mentioned Susan's name.

As soon as he was out of the office, I had it open.

And as soon as I had it open, I stared at it in shock.

The title page of the sheaf inside was headed: Signorina Renata dell'Angela. Age 22; daughter of Benedetto dell'Angela; accepted to general Class-AA; no employment. There were more details.

But across all, in big red letters, was a rubber stamp: *Policy Canceled. Reassigned Class-E.*

It meant that the sad-eyed Rena was completely uninsurable.

#### IV

**P**HONE or no phone, I still had her address.

It was still daylight when I got out of the cab, and I had a chance for a good look at the house. It was a handsome place by day; the size of the huge white stucco wall didn't fit the *uninsurable* notation on Rena's claim. That wall enclosed a garden; the garden could hardly hold less than an AA house. And Class-Es were ordinarily either sent to public hostels — at the

Company's expense, to be sure — or existed on the charity of friends or relatives. And Class-Es seldom had friends in Class-AA houses.

I knocked at the gate. A fat woman, age uncertain but extreme, opened a little panel and peered at me. I asked politely, "Miss dell'Angela?"

The woman scowled. "Che dice?"

I repeated: "May I see Miss dell'Angela? I'm a Claims Adjuster for the Company. I have some business with her in connection with her policies."

"Ha!" said the woman. She left it at that for a moment, pursing her lips and regarding me thoughtfully. Then she shrugged apathetically. "Momento," she said wearily, and left me standing outside the gate.

From inside there was a muttering of unfamiliar voices. I thought I heard a door open, and the sound of steps, but when the fat woman came back she was alone.

Silently she opened the door and nodded me in. I started automatically up the courtyard toward the enclosed house, but she caught my arm and motioned me toward another path. It led down a flowered lane through a grape arbor to what might, at one time, have been a caretaker's hut.

I knocked on the door of the hut, comprehending where Rena dell'Angela lived as a Class-E uninsurable.

Rena herself opened it, her face flushed, her expression surprised — apprehensive, almost, I thought at first. It was the first time I had seen her by daylight. She was — oh, there was no other word. She was lovely.

She said quickly, "Mr. Wills! I didn't expect you."

I said, "You phoned me. I came as soon as I could."

She hesitated. "I did," she admitted. "It was — I'm sorry, Mr. Wills. It was an impulse. I shouldn't have done it."

"What was it, Rena?"

She shook her head. "I am sorry. It doesn't matter. But I am a bad hostess; won't you come in?"

**T**HE room behind the door was long and narrow, with worn furniture and a door that led, perhaps, to another room behind. It seemed dusty and, hating myself as a snooping fool, I took careful note that there was a faint aroma of tobacco. I had been quite sure that she didn't smoke, that evening we had met.

She gestured at a chair — there only were two, both pulled up to a crude wooden table, on which were two poured cups of

coffee. "Please sit down," she invited.

I reminded myself that it was, after all, none of my business if she chose to entertain friends — even friends who smoked particularly rancid tobacco. And if they preferred not to be around when I came to the door, why, that was their business, not mine. I said cautiously, "I didn't mean to interrupt you."

"Interrupt me?" She saw my eyes on the cups. "Oh — oh, no, Mr. Wills. That other cup is for you, you see. I poured it when Luisa told me you were at the gate. It isn't very good, I'm afraid," she said apologetically.

I made an effort to sip the coffee; it was terrible. I set it down. "Rena, I just found out about your policies. Believe me, I'm sorry. I hadn't known about it, when we had dinner together; I would have — Well, I don't know what I would have done. There isn't much I can do, truthfully; I don't want you thinking I have any great power. But I wish I had known — I might not have made you cry, at any rate."

She smiled an odd sort of smile. "That wasn't the reason, Mr. Wills."

"Please call me Tom. Well, then, why did you cry?"

"It is of no importance. Please."





I coughed and tried a different tack. "You understand that I do have some authority. And I would like to help you if I can — if you'll let me."

"Let you? How could I prevent it?"

Her eyes were deep and dark. I shook myself and pulled the notes I'd made on her policies from my pocket. In the most official voice I could manage, I said, "You see, there may be some leeway in interpreting the facts. As it stands, frankly, there isn't much hope. But if you'll give me some information —"

"Certainly."

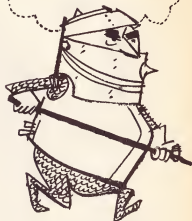
"All right. Now, your father — Benedetto dell'Angela. He was a casualty of the war with Sicily; he got a dose of radiation, and he is at present in a low-metabolism state in the clinic at Anzio, waiting for the radiogens to clear out of his system. Is that correct?"

"It is what the Company's report said," she answered.

**H**ER tone was odd. Surely she wasn't doubting a Company report!

"As his dependent, Rena, you applied for subsistence benefits on his Blue Blanket policies, as well as war-risk benefits under the Blue Bolt. Both applications were refused; the Blue Blanket because your father is technically

**Don't sit back**



**STRIKE BACK!**



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not hospitalized; the Blue Bolt, as well as all your other personal policies, was cancelled, because of —" I stuttered over it — "of activities against the best interest of the Company. Specifically, giving aid and comfort to a known troublemaker whose name is given here as Slovetzki." I showed her the cancellation sheet I had stolen from the files.

She shrugged. "This much I know, Tom," she said.

"Why?" I demanded. "This man is believed to have been instrumental in inciting the war with Sicily!"

She flared, "Tom, that's a lie! Slovetzki is an old friend of my father's — they studied together in Berlin, many years ago. He is utterly, completely against war — any war!"

I hesitated. "Well, let's put that aside. But you realize that, in view of this, the Company can maintain — quite properly in a technical sense — that you contributed to the war, and therefore you can't collect Blue Bolt compensation for a war you helped bring about. You were warned, you see. You can't even say that you didn't know what you were doing."

"Tom," Rena's voice was infinitely patient and sad. "I knew what I was doing."

"In that case, Rena, you have

to admit that it seems fair enough. Still, perhaps we can get something for you — even if only a refund of your premiums. The Company doesn't always follow the letter of the law, there are always exceptions, so —"

Her expression stopped me. She was smiling, but it was the tortured smile of Prometheus contemplating the cosmic jest that was ripping out his vitals.

I ASKED uncertainly, "Don't you believe me?"

"Believe you, Tom? Indeed I do." She laughed out loud that time. "After what happened to my father, I assure you, Tom, I am certain that the Company doesn't always follow the law."

I shook my head quickly. "No, you don't understand. I —"

"I understand quite well." She studied me for a moment, then patted my hand. "Let us talk of something else."

"Won't you tell me why your policy was cancelled?"

She said evenly, "It's in the file. Because I was a bad girl."

"But why? Why —"

"Because, Tom. Please, no more. I know you are trying to be just as helpful as you can, but there is no help you can give."

"You don't make it easy, Rena."

"It can't be easy! You see, I

admit everything. I was warned. I helped an old friend whom the Company wanted to — shall we say — treat for radiation sickness? So there is no question that my policy can be cancelled. All legal. It is not the only one of its kind, you know. So why discuss it?"

"Why shouldn't we?"

Her expression softened. "Because — because we do not agree. And never shall."

I stared at her blankly. She was being very difficult. Really, I shouldn't be bothering with her, someone I barely knew, someone I hadn't even heard of until —

That reminded me. I said, "Rena, how did you know my name?"

Her eyes went opaque. "Know your name, Tom? Why, Mr. Gogarty introduced us."

"No. You knew of me before that. Come clean, Rena. Please."

She said flatly, "I don't know what you mean." She was beginning to act agitated. I had seen her covertly glancing at her watch several times; now she held it up openly — ostentatiously, in fact. "I am sorry, but you'd better go," she said with a hint of anxiety in her voice. "Please excuse me."

Well, there seemed no good reason to stay. So I went — not happily; not with any sense of

accomplishment; and fully conscious of the figure I cut to the unseen watcher in the other room, the man whose coffee I had usurped.

Because there was no longer a conjecture about whether there had been such a person or not. I had heard him sneeze three times.

**B**ACK at my hotel, a red light was flashing on the phone as I let myself in. I unlocked the play-back with my room key and got a recorded message that Gogarty wanted me to phone him at once.

He answered the phone on the first ring, looking like the wrath of God. It took me a moment to recognize the symptoms; then it struck home.

The lined gray face, the jittery twitching of the head, the slow, tortured movements; here was a man with a classic textbook case of his ailment. The evidence was medically conclusive. He had been building up to a fancy drinking party, and something made him stop in the middle.

There were few tortures worse than a grade-A hangover, but one of those that qualified was the feeling of having the drink die slowly, going through the process of sobering up without the anesthetic of sleep.

He winced as the scanning lights from the phone hit him. "Wills," he said sourly. "About time. Listen, you've got to go up to Anzio. We've got a distinguished visitor, and he wants to talk to you."

"Me?"

"You! He knows you — his name is Defoe."

The name crashed over me; I hadn't expected that, of all things. He was a member of the Council of Underwriters! I thought they never ventured far from the Home Office. In fact, I thought they never had a moment to spare from the awesome duties of running the Company.

Gogarty explained. "He appeared out of nowhere at Carmody Field. I was still in Caserta! Just settling down to a couple of drinks with Susan, and they phoned me to say Chief Underwriter Defoe is on my doorstep!"

I cut in, "What does he want?"

Gogarty puffed his plump cheeks. "How do I know? He doesn't like the way things are going, I guess. Well, I don't like them either! But I've been twenty-six years with the Company, and if he thinks. . . Snooping and prying. There are going to be some changes in the office, I can tell you. Somebody's been passing on all kinds of lying gossip and —" He broke off and stared

at me calculatingly as an idea hit him.

Then he shook his head. "No. Couldn't be you, Wills, could it? You only got here, and Defoe's obviously been getting this stuff for weeks. Maybe months. Still — Say, how did you come to know him?"

IT WAS none of his business. I said coldly, "At the Home Office. I guess I'll take the morning plane up to Anzio, then."

"The hell you will. You'll take the night train. It gets you there an hour earlier." Gogarty jerked his head righteously — then winced and clutched his temple. He said miserably, "Oh, damn. Tom, I don't like all of this. I think something happened to Hammond."

I repeated, "Happened? What could happen to him?"

"I don't know. But I found out a few things. He's been seen with some mighty peculiar people in Caserta. What's this about somebody with a gun waiting at the office for him when you were there?"

It took a moment for me to figure out what he was talking about. "Oh," I said, "you mean the man at the car? I didn't know he had a gun, for certain."

"I do," Gogarty said shortly. "The expeditors tried to pick him

up today, to question him about Hammond. He shot his way out."

I told Gogarty what I knew, although it wasn't much. He listened abstractedly and, when I had finished, he sighed. "Well, that's no help," he grumbled. "Better get ready to catch your train."

I nodded and reached to cut off the connection. He waved half-heartedly. "Oh, yes," he added, "give my regards to Susan if you see her."

"Isn't she here?"

He grimaced. "Your friend Defoe said he needed a secretary. He requisitioned her."

**I** BOARDED the Anzio train from the same platform where I had seen Zorchi dive under the wheels. But this was no sleek express; it was an ancient three-car string that could not have been less than fifty years out of date. The cars were not even air-conditioned.

Sleep was next to impossible, so I struck up a conversation with an expediter-officer. He was stand-offish at first but, when he found out I was a Claims Adjuster, he mellowed and produced some interesting information.

It was reasonable that Defoe would put aside his other duties and make a quick visit to Anzio, because Anzio seemed to need

someone to do something about it pretty badly. My officer was part of a new levy being sent up there; the garrison was being doubled; there had been trouble. He was vague about what kind of "trouble" it had been, but it sounded like mob violence. I mentioned Caserta and the near-riot I had been in; the officer's eyes hooded over, and about five minutes after that he pointedly leaned back and pulled his hat over his eyes. Evidently it was not good form to discuss actual riots.

I accepted the rebuke, but I was puzzled in my mind as I tried to get some sleep for myself.

What kind of a place was this Naples, where mobs rioted against the Company and even intelligent-seeming persons like Renata dell'Angela appeared to have some reservations about it?

## V

**I** SLEPT, more or less, for an hour or so in that cramped coach seat. I was half asleep when the train-expediter nudged my elbow and said, "Anzio."

It was early — barely past daybreak. It was much too early to find a cab. I got directions from a drowsing stationmaster and walked toward the vaults.

The "clinic," as the official term went, was buried in the feet of the hills just beyond the beaches. I was astonished at the size of it. Not because it was so large; on the contrary. It was, as far as I could see, only a broad, low shed.

Then it occurred to me that the vaults were necessarily almost entirely underground, for the sake of economy in keeping them down to the optimum suspendee temperature. It was safe enough and simple enough to put a man in suspended animation but, as I understood it, it was necessary to be sure that the suspendees never got much above fifty degrees temperature for any length of time. Above that, they had an unwelcome tendency to decay.

This was, I realized, the first full-scale "clinic" I had ever seen. I had known that the Company had hundreds, perhaps thousands, of them scattered all over the world.

I had heard that the Company had enough of them, mostly in out-of-the-way locations, to deep-freeze the entire human race at once, though that seemed hardly reasonable.

I had even heard some ugly, never-quite-made-clear stories about *why* the Company had so many clinics . . . but when peo-

ple began hinting at such ridiculous unpleasantness, I felt it was my duty to make it clear that I wanted to hear no subversive talk. So I had never got the details — and certainly would never have believed them for a moment if I had.

IT WAS very early in the morning, as I say, but it seemed that I was not the first to arrive at the clinic. On the sparse grass before the main entrance, half a dozen knots of men and women were standing around apathetically. Some of them glared at me as I came near them, for reasons I did not understand; others merely stared.

I heard a hoarse whisper as I passed one group of middle-aged women. One of them was saying, "Benedetto non é morte." She seemed to be directing it to me; but it meant nothing. The only comment that came to my somewhat weary mind was, "So what if Benedetto isn't dead?"

A huge armed expediter, yawning and scratching, let me in to the executive office. I explained that I had been sent for by Mr. Defoe. I had to wait until Mr. Defoe was ready to receive me and was finally conducted to a suite of rooms.

This might have once been an authentic clinic; it had the aseptic

tic appearance of a depressing hospital room. One for, say, Class-Cs with terminal myasthenia. Now, though, it had been refitted as a private guest suite, with an attempt at luxurious drapes and deep stuffed armchairs superimposed on the basic adjustable beds and stainless steel plumbing.

I hadn't seen Defoe in some time, but he hadn't changed at all. He was, as always, the perfect model of a Company executive of general-officer rank. He was formal, but not unyielding. He was tall, distinguished-gray at the temples, spare, immaculately outfitted in the traditional vest and bow tie.

I recalled our first meeting. He was from the side of Marianna's family that she talked about, and she fluttered around for three whole days, checking our Blue Plate policies for every last exotic dish we could squeeze out to offer him, planning the television programs allowed under our entertainment policies, selecting the most respectable of our friends — "acquaintances" would be a better description; Marianna didn't make friends easily — to make up a dinner party. He'd arrived at the stroke of the hour he was due, and had brought with him what was undoubtedly his idea of a princely gift for newly-

weds — a paid-up extra-coverage maternity benefit rider on our Blue Blanket policies.

We thanked him effusively. And, for my part, sincerely. That was before I had known Marianna's views on children; she had no intentions of raising a family.

AS I walked in on Defoe in his private suite at the clinic, he was standing with his back to me, at a small washstand, peering at his reflection in a mirror. He appeared to have finished shaving. I rubbed my own bristled chin uneasily.

He said over his shoulder, "Good morning, Thomas. Sit down."

I sat on the edge of an enormous wing chair. He pursed his lips, stretched the skin under his chin and, when he seemed perfectly satisfied the job was complete, he said as though he were continuing a conversation, "Fill me in on your interview with Zorchi, Thomas."

It was the first I'd known he'd ever *heard* of Zorchi. I hesitantly began to tell him about the meeting in the hospital. It did not, I knew, do me very much credit, but it simply didn't occur to me to try to make my own part look better. I suppose that if I thought of the matter at all, I simply thought that Defoe would in-

stantly detect any attempt to gloss things over. He hardly seemed to be paying attention to me, though; he was preoccupied with the remainder of his morning ritual — carefully massaging his face with something fragrant, brushing his teeth with a maddening, old-fashioned insistence on careful strokes, combing his hair almost strand by strand.

Then he took a small bottle with a daub attached to the stopper and touched it to the distinguished gray at his temples.

I spluttered in the middle of a word; I had never thought of the possibility that the handsomely grayed temples of the Company's senior executives, as inevitable as the vest or the watch chain, were equally a part of the uniform! Defoe gave me a long inquiring look in the mirror; I coughed and went on with a careful description of Zorchi's temper tantrum.

Defoe turned to me and nodded gravely. There was neither approval nor disapproval. He had asked for information and the information had been received.

He pressed a communicator button and ordered breakfast. The microphone must have been there, but it was invisible. He sat down at a small, surgical-looking table, leaned back and folded his hands.

"Now," he said, "tell me what happened in Caserta just before Hammond disappeared."

Talking to Defoe had something of the quality of shouting down a well. I collected my thoughts and told him all I knew on the riot at the branch office.

While I was talking, Defoe's breakfast arrived. He didn't know I hadn't eaten anything, of course — I say "of course" because I know he couldn't have known, he didn't ask. I looked at it longingly, but all my looking didn't alter the fact that there was only one plate, one cup, one set of silverware.

**H**E ATE his breakfast as methodically as he'd brushed his teeth. I doubt if it took him five minutes. Since I finished the Caserta story in about three, the last couple of minutes were in dead silence, Defoe eating, me sitting mute as a disconnected jukebox.

Then he pushed the little table away, lit a cigarette and said, "You may smoke if you wish, Thomas. Come in, Susan."

He didn't raise his voice; and when, fifteen seconds later, Susan Manchester walked in, he didn't look at all impressed with the efficiency of his secretary, his intercom system, or himself. The concealed microphone, it oc-



curred to me, had heard him order breakfast and request his secretary to walk in. It had undoubtedly heard — and most probably recorded — every word I had said.

How well they did things on the upper echelon of the Company!

Susan looked — different. She was as blonde and pretty as ever. But she wasn't bubbly. She smiled at me in passing and handed Defoe a typed script, which he scanned carefully.

He asked, "Nothing new on Hammond?"

"No, sir," she said.

"All right. You may leave this." She nodded and left. Defoe turned back to me. "I have some news for you, Thomas. Hammond has been located."

"That's good," I said. "Not too badly hung over, I hope."

He gave me an arctic smile. "Hardly. He was found by a couple of peasants who were picking grapes. He's dead."

—EDSON McCANN

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# The Necessary Thing

By ROBERT SHECKLEY

*The idea behind the machine was splendid  
— if only it did not have ideas all its own!*

Illustrated by DICK FRANCIS

**R**ICHARD Gregor was seated at his desk in the dusty offices of the AAA Ace Interplanetary Decontamination Service, staring wearily at a list. The list included some two thousand three hundred and five separate items.

Gregor was trying to remember what, if anything, he had left out. Anti-radiation salve? Vacuum flares? Water purification kit? Yes, they were all there.

He yawned and glanced at his watch. Arnold, his partner, should have been back by now. Arnold had gone to order the two thousand three hundred and five

items and get them stowed safely aboard the spaceship. In a few hours, AAA Ace was scheduled to blast off on another job.

But had he listed everything important? A spaceship is, necessarily, an island unto itself, self-sufficient, self-sustaining. If you ran out of beans on Dementia II, there was no corner store where you could buy more. No Coast Guard hurried out to replace the burned-out lining on your main drive. You had to have another lining on board, and the tools to enable you to replace it, and the manuals telling how. Space was just too big to permit much in

the way of rescue operations.

Oxygen extractor? Extra cigarettes? It was like putting jets on a department store, Gregor thought. He pushed the list aside, found a pack of tattered cards, and laid out a complex solitaire of his own devising.

Minutes later, Arnold stepped jauntily in.

**G**REGOR looked at his partner with suspicion. When the little chemist walked with that peculiar bouncing step, his round face beaming happily, it often resulted in trouble for AAA Ace.

"Did you get the stuff?" Gregor asked.

"I did better than that," Arnold said proudly. "I have just saved us a considerable sum of money."

"Oh, no," Gregor sighed. "What have you done?"

"Consider," Arnold said impressively, "just consider the sheer waste in equipping the average expedition. We pack two thousand three hundred and five items, just on the off chance we may need one. Our payload is diminished, our living space is cramped, and most of the stuff never gets used."

"Except for once or twice," Gregor said, "when it just happens to save our lives."

"I took that into account. I gave the whole problem careful

study. And, through a bit of luck, I found the one and only thing an expedition needs. The necessary thing."

Gregor arose and towered over his partner. Visions of mayhem danced through his brain, but he controlled himself with an effort. "Arnold, I don't know what you've done. But you'd better get those two thousand three hundred and five items on board and get them fast."

"Can't do it," Arnold said with a nervous little laugh. "The money's gone. This thing will pay for itself, though."

"What thing?"

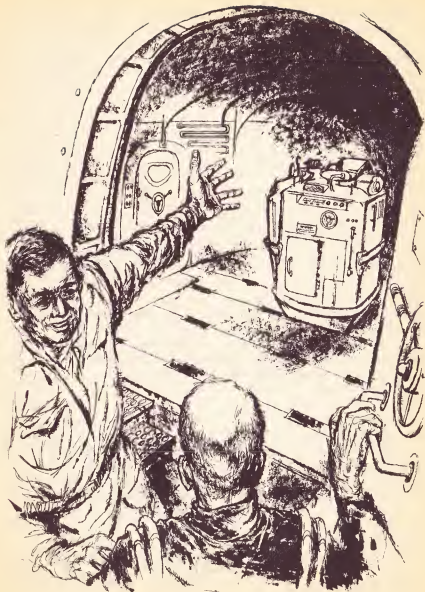
"The one really necessary thing. Come out to the ship and I'll show you."

Gregor couldn't get another word out of him. Arnold smiled mysteriously on the long drive to Idlewild Spaceport. Their ship was already in a blast pit, scheduled for takeoff in a few hours.

Arnold swung the port open with a flourish. "There! Behold the answer to an expedition's prayers."

Gregor stepped inside. He saw a large and fantastic-looking machine with dials, lights and indicators scattered haphazardly over it.

"Isn't it a beauty?" Arnold patted the machine affectionately. "Joe the Interstellar Junkman



happened to have it tucked away. I conned it out of him for a song."

**T**HAT settled it as far as Gregor was concerned. He had dealt with Joe the Interstellar Junkman before, and had inevitably come out on the shortest end of the deal. Joe's gadgets worked, but when, how often, and with what kind of attitude, was something else again.

Gregor was stern. "No gadget of Joe's is going into space with me. Not again. Maybe we can sell it for scrap metal." He began to hunt around for a wrecking bar.

"Wait," Arnold begged. "Let me show you. Consider. We are in deep space. The main drive falters and fails. Upon examination, we find that a quarter-inch durraloy nut has worked its way off the number three pinion. We can't find the nut. What do we do?"

"We take a new nut from the two thousand three hundred and five items we've packed for emergencies just like this," Gregor said.

"Ah! But you didn't include any quarter-inch durraloy nuts!" Arnold was triumphant. "I checked the list. What then?"

"I don't know, you tell me."

Arnold stepped up to the machine, punched a button and said

in a loud, clear voice, "Durraloy nut, quarter-inch diameter."

The machine murmured and hummed — Lights flashed — A panel slid back, revealing a bright, freshly machined durraloy nut.

"That's what we do," Arnold said.

"Hmm," Gregor was not particularly impressed. "So it manufactures nuts. What else does it do?"

Arnold pressed the button again. "A pound of fresh shrimp."

When he slid back the panel, the shrimp were there.

"I should have had it peel them," Arnold said. "Oh, well." He pressed the button. "A graphite rod, four feet long with a diameter of two inches."

The panel opened wider this time to let the rod come through.

"What else can it do?" Gregor asked.

"What else would you like?" Arnold said. "A small tiger cub? A Model-A updraft carburetor? Possibly a 25-watt light bulb? Or a stick of chewing gum?"

"You mean it'll turn out *anything*?" Gregor asked.

"Anything at all. It's a Configurator. Go ahead, try it yourself."

Gregor tried and produced in rapid succession, a pint of fresh water, a wrist watch, and a jar of

Mother Merton's cocktail sauce.

"Hmm," he said.

"See what I mean? Isn't this better than packing two thousand three hundred and five items? Isn't it simpler and more logical to produce what you need when you need it?"

"It seems good," Gregor said.

"But . . ."

"But what?"

Gregor shook his head. What indeed? He had no idea. It had simply been his sad experience that gadgets are never as useful, reliable or consistent as they seem at first glance.

He thought deeply, then punched the button. "A transistor, series GE 1324E."

The machine hummed. And there was the tiny transistor.

"Seems pretty good," Gregor admitted. "What are you doing, now?"

"I'm peeling the shrimp," Arnold said.

After enjoying a tasty shrimp cocktail, the partners received their clearance from the tower. In an hour, the ship was in space.

**THEY** were bound for Dennett IV, an average-sized world in the Sycophax cluster. Dennett was a hot, steamy, fertile planet, suffering from only one major difficulty: Too much rain. It rained on Dennett nine-tenths of

the time, and when it wasn't raining, it was threatening rain.

Fortunately, the principles of climate control were well-known, since many worlds suffered from similar difficulties. It would take only a few days for AAA Ace to interrupt and alter the climate pattern.

After an uneventful trip, Dennett came into view. Arnold relieved the automatic pilot and brought the ship down through thick cloud banks. They dropped through miles of pale, gossamer mist. At last, mountain-tops began to appear, and then they saw a level, barren gray plain.

"Odd color for a landscape," Gregor said .

Arnold nodded. With practiced ease he spiraled, leveled out, came down neatly above the plain and, with his forces balanced, cut the drive.

Gregor had a sudden premonition of disaster. "Take her up!" he shouted. Reacting instinctively, Arnold jabbed at the firing control and missed. The ship hung for a moment, then dropped *through* the plain and fell another eight feet toward the ground.

The plain, it seemed, was fog of a density only Dennett could produce.

Hastily they unbuckled themselves and tested various teeth,

bones and ligatures. Upon finding that nothing personal was broken, they thoroughly checked the ship.

The impact hadn't done their old spaceship any good. The radio and automatic pilot were a complete loss. Several stern plates had buckled and, worst of all, some delicate components in the turn-drive control were shattered.

"We were lucky at that," Arnold said.

"Yeah." Gregor peered through the blanketing mist. "But next time we use radar."

"In a way I'm glad it happened," Arnold said. "Now you'll see what a lifesaver the Configurator really is. Let's get to work."

**T**HEY listed all the damaged parts. Arnold stepped up to the Configurator, pressed the button and said, "A drive plate, five inches square, half-inch diameter, steel alloy 342."

The machine quickly turned it out.

"We need ten of them," Gregor said.

"I know." Again Arnold pressed the button. "Another one."

The machine did nothing.

"Probably have to give the whole command," Arnold said. He punched the button again and said, "Drive plate, five inches

square, half-inch diameter, steel alloy 342."

The machine was silent.

"That's odd," Arnold said.

"Isn't it, though?" Gregor had an odd sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach.

Arnold tried again with no success. He thought deeply, then punched the button and said, "A plastic teacup."

The machine turned out a teacup of bright blue plastic.

"Another one," Arnold ordered. When the Configurator did nothing, Arnold asked for a wax crayon. The machine gave it to him. "Another wax crayon." The machine did nothing. "That's interesting. I suppose someone should have thought of that possibility."

"What possibility?"

"Apparently the Configurator will turn out anything," Arnold said. "But only once."

"That's fine. We need nine more plates. And the turn-drive controls need four identical parts. What are we going to do?"

"We'll think of something."

"I hope so," Gregor said.

Outside the rain began. The partners settled down to think.

**"T**HERE'S only one explanation," Arnold said several hours later. "Pleasure principle."

"Huh?" Gregor asked. He had

been dozing, lulled by the patter of rain against the hull of their spaceship.

"This machine must have some form of intelligence," Arnold said. "After all, it receives stimuli, translates 'em into action commands, and fabricates a product from a mental blueprint."

"Sure it does. But only once."

"Yes. But *why* only once? That's the key to our difficulties. I think it must be a self-imposed limit linked to a pleasure drive."

"I don't follow you," Gregor said.

"Look. The builders wouldn't have limited their machine in this way purposely. The only possible explanation is this: When a machine is constructed on this order of complexity, it takes on quasi-human characteristics. It derives a mechanical pleasure from producing a new thing. But a thing is only new once. After that, the Configurator wants to do something else."

Gregor slumped back into his apathetic half-slumber.

Arnold went on talking. "Fulfillment of potential, that's what a machine wants. The Configurator's desire is to create everything possible. From this point of view, repetition would be a waste of time, as well as boring."

"That's the most suspect line of reasoning I've ever heard,"

Gregor said. "But, assuming you are right, what can we do about it?"

"I don't know," Arnold said.

"That's what I thought."

For dinner that evening, the Configurator turned out a very creditable roast beef. They finished with apple pie *à la machina* with sharp cheese on the side. Their morale was considerably improved.

"Substitutions," Gregor said later, smoking a cigar *à la machina*. "That's what we'll have to try. Alloy 342 isn't the only thing we can use for the plates. There are plenty of materials that'll last until we get back to Earth."

THE Configurator couldn't be tricked into producing a plate of iron, or any of the steel alloys. They asked for and received a plate of bronze. But then the machine wouldn't give them copper or tin. Aluminum was acceptable, as was cadmium, platinum, gold and silver. A tungsten plate was an interesting rarity; Arnold wished he knew how the machine had cast it. Gregor vetoed plutonium, and they were running short of suitable metals. Arnold hit upon an extra-tough ceramic as a good substitute. And the final plate was pure zinc.

The noble metals would tend to melt in the heat of space, of



course. But with proper refrigeration, they might last as far as Earth. All in all, it was a good night's work, and the partners toasted each other with an excellent, though somewhat oily, sherry.

The next day, they bolted the plates into place and surveyed their handiwork. The rear of their ship looked like a patchwork quilt.

"I think it's quite pretty," Arnold said.

"I just hope it'll last," said Gregor. "Now for the turn-drive components."

But that was a different problem altogether. Four identical parts were missing — delicate, precisely engineered affairs of glass and wire. No substitutions were possible.

The Configurator turned out the first without hesitation. But that was all. By noon, both men were disgusted.

"Any ideas?" Gregor asked.

"Not at the moment. Let's take a break for lunch."

They decided that lobster salad would be pleasant and ordered it on the machine. The Configurator hummed for a moment, but produced nothing.

"What's wrong now?" Gregor glared at the machine.

"I was afraid of this," Arnold said.

"Afraid of what? We haven't asked for lobster before."

"No," Arnold said, "but we did ask for shrimp. Both are shellfish. I'm afraid the Configurator is beginning to make decisions according to classes."

"Then you'd better break out a few cans."

Arnold smiled feebly. "Well, after I bought the Configurator, I didn't think we'd have to bother. I mean —"

"No cans?"

"Nope."

They returned to the machine and asked for salmon, trout and tuna, without results. Then they tried roast pork, leg of lamb and veal. Nothing.

"I guess it considers our roast beef representative of all mammals," Arnold said. "This is interesting. We might be able to evolve a whole new theory of classes —"

"While starving to death," Gregor interrupted. He tried roast chicken, and this time the Configurator came through without hesitation.

"Eureka!" Arnold shouted.

"Damn!" Gregor said. "I should have asked for a turkey. A big one."

THE rain continued to fall on Dennett and mist swirled around the spaceship's gaudy

patchwork stern. Arnold began a long series of slide-rule calculations.

Gregor finished off the sherry, tried unsuccessfully to order a case of Scotch, and started playing solitaire. He always did his best thinking while playing.

They ate a frugal supper on the remains of the chicken and then Arnold completed his calculations.

"It might work," he said.

"What might work?"

"The pleasure principle," Arnold stood up and began to pace the cabin. "This machine has quasi-human characteristics. Certainly it possesses learning potential. I think we can teach it to derive pleasure from producing the same thing many times. Namely, the turn-drive components."

"It's worth a try," Gregor agreed. "But now you know why Configurators wound up at Joe the Junkman's instead of on the market."

Late into the night, they talked to the machine. Arnold murmured persuasively about the joys of Repetition. Gregor spoke highly of the esthetic values inherent in producing an artistic object such as a turn-drive component, not once but many times, each item an exact and perfect duplicate.

Arnold murmured lyrically to the machine about the thrill, the supreme thrill of fabricating endlessly parts without end; again and again, the same parts, produced of the same material, turned out at the same rate. Ecstasy!

And, Gregor put in, Repetition was so beautiful a concept philosophically and so completely suited to the peculiar makeup and capabilities of a machine. As a conceptual system, he continued, Repetition (as opposed to mere Creation) closely approached the status of entropy, which, mechanistically, was perfection.

By clicks and flashes, the Configurator showed that it was listening intently. And when Dennett's damp and pallid dawn was in the sky, Arnold pushed the button and gave the command for a turn-drive component.

The machine hesitated. Lights flickered uncertainly, indicators turned in a momentary hunting process. Doubt showed in every tube.

There was a click. The panel slid back — and there was another turn-drive component.

"Success!" Gregor shouted, and slapped Arnold on the back. Quickly he gave the order again. But this time the Configurator emitted a loud and emphatic buzz.

And produced nothing.

Gregor tried again. But there was no more uncertainty from the machine — and no more components.

"What's wrong now?" Gregor asked.

"It's obvious," Arnold said sadly. "It decided to give repetition a try, just in case it had missed something. But after trying it, the Configurator decided it didn't like it."

"A machine that doesn't like repetition!" Gregor groaned. "It's inhuman!"

"On the contrary," Arnold said unhappily. "It's all too damned human."

**I**T WAS suppertime, and the partners had to rack their memories for foods the Configurator would produce. A vegetable plate was easy enough, but not too filling. The machine allowed them one loaf of bread, but no cake. Milk products were out, since they had had cheese the other day.

Finally, after an hour of trial and error, the Configurator gave them a pound of whale steak, apparently uncertain as to its category.

Gregor went back to work, crooning the joys of repetition into the machine's receptors. A steady hum and occasional flash-

es of light showed that the Configurator was listening. It was a hopeful sign.

Arnold took out several reference books and embarked on a project of his own. Several hours later he looked up with a shout of triumph. "I knew I'd find it!"

"What?"

"A substitute turn-drive control!" He pushed the book under Gregor's nose. "Look there. A scientist on Vednier II perfected this fifty years ago. It's clumsy, by modern standards, but it'll work. And it'll fit into our ship."

"But what's it made of?" Gregor asked.

"That's the best part of it. We can't miss! It's made of rubber!"

Quickly he punched the Configurator's button and read the description of the turn-drive control.

Nothing happened.

"You have to turn out the Vednier control!" Arnold shouted at the machine. "If you don't, you're violating your own principles!" He punched the button and, enunciating with painful clarity, read the description again.

Nothing happened.

Gregor had a sudden terrible suspicion. He walked to the back of the Configurator, found what he had feared and pointed it out to Arnold.

There was a manufacturer's

plate bolted there. It read: *Class 3 Configurator. Made by Vednier Laboratories, Vednier II.*

"So they've already used it for that," Arnold said.

Gregor didn't speak. There just didn't seem to be anything to say.

**M**ILDEW was beginning to form inside the spaceship, and rust had already appeared on the steel plate in the stern. The machine still listened to the partners' song of repetition, but did nothing about it.

The problem of another meal came up. Fruit was out because of the apple pie, as were all meats, vegetables, milk products, fish and cereals. At last they dined sparsely on frogs' legs, baked grasshoppers (from an old Chinese recipe) and filet of iguana. But now, with lizards, insects and amphibians used up, they knew that their machine-made meals were practically at an end.

Both men were showing signs of strain. Gregor's long face became bonier than ever. Arnold found traces of mildew forming in his hair.

Outside, the rain poured ceaselessly, dripped past the portholes and into the moist ground. The spaceship began to settle, burying itself under its own weight.

For their next meal they could

think of nothing whatever.

Then Gregor conceived an idea.

He thought it over carefully. Another failure would shatter their badly bent morale. But, slim though the chance of success might be, he had to try it.

Slowly he approached the Configurator.

Arnold looked up, frightened by the wild light gleaming in his eyes. "Gregor! What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to give this thing one last command." With a trembling hand, Gregor punched the button and whispered his request.

There was a moment of utter silence. Then Arnold shouted, "Get back!"

The Configurator was quivering and shaking, dials twitching, lights flickering. Heat and energy gauges flashed through red into purple.

"What did you tell it to produce?" Arnold asked.

"I didn't tell it to produce anything," Gregor said. "I told it to reproduce!"

The Configurator gave a convulsive shudder and emitted a cloud of black smoke. The partners coughed and gasped for air.

When the smoke cleared away, the Configurator was still there, its paint chipped and several in-

dicators bent out of shape. And, beside it, glistening with machine oil, new and factory-fresh, was a duplicate Configurator.

"You've done it!" Arnold was exultant. "You've saved us!"

"I've done more than that," Gregor said with weary satisfaction. "I've made our fortunes." He turned to the duplicate Configurator, pressed its button and cried, "Reproduce yourself!"

**W**ITHIN a week, Arnold, Gregor and three Configurators were back in Idlewild Spaceport, the work on Dennett completed. As soon as they landed, Arnold left the ship and caught a taxi.

He went first to Canal Street, then to midtown New York. His business didn't take long and soon he was back at the ship.

"Yes, it's all right," he called to Gregor. "I contacted several jewelers. We can dispose of quite a few big stones without depressing the market. After that, I think we should have the Configurators

concentrate on radium for a while, and then — What's wrong?"

Gregor looked at him sourly. "Notice anything different?"

"Huh?" Arnold stared around the cabin, at Gregor, and at the Configurators.

Then he noticed it.

There were four Configurators in the cabin, where there had been only three.

"You had one of them reproduce?" Arnold asked. "Nothing wrong with that. Just tell them to turn out a diamond apiece —"

"You still don't get it. Watch." Gregor pressed the button on the nearest Configurator and said, "A diamond."

The Configurator began to quiver.

"Repetition!" Gregor said. "It's ruined everything. You and your damned pleasure principle."

The machine shook all over and produced —

Another Configurator.

—ROBERT SHECKLEY

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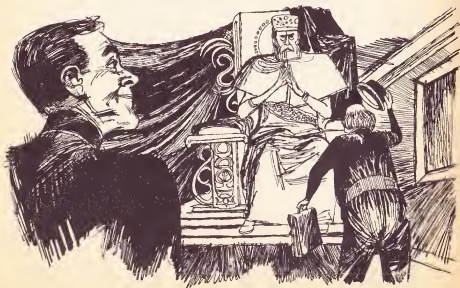
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# *The Princess and the Physicist*

By EVELYN E. SMITH

*Elected a god, Zen the Omnipotent longed  
for supernatural powers — for he was also  
Zen the All-Put-Upon, a galactic sucker!*

Illustrated by KOSSIN



**Z**EN the Terrible lay quiescent in the secret retreat which housed his corporeal being, all the aspects of his personality wallowing in the luxury of a day off. How glad he was that he'd had the forethought to stipulate a weekly holiday for himself when first this godhood had been thrust upon him, hundreds of centuries before. He'd accepted the perquisites of divinity with pleasure then. It was some little time before he discovered its drawbacks, and by then it was too late; he had become the established church.

All the aspects of his personality rested . . . save one, that is. And that one, stretching out an impalpable tendril of curiosity, brought back to his total consciousness the news that a spaceship from Earth had arrived when no ship from Earth was due.

*So what? the total consciousness asked lazily of itself. Probably they have a large out-of-season order for hajench. My hajench going to provide salad bowls for barbarians!*

When, twenty years previously, the Earthmen had come back to their colony on Uxen after a lapse of thousands of years, Zen had been hopeful that they would take some of the Divine Work off his hands. After all, since it was they who had originally es-





tablished the colony, it should be their responsibility. But it seemed that all humans, not merely the Uxenach, were irresponsible. The Earthmen were interested only in trade and tribute. They even refused to believe in the existence of Zen, an attitude which he found extremely irritating to his ego.

**T**RUE, Uxen prospered commercially to a mild extent after their return, for the local ceramics that had been developed in the long interval found wide acceptance throughout the Galaxy, particularly the low bowls which had hitherto been used only for burning incense before Zen the Formidable.

Now every two-bit planet offered hajench in its gift shops.

Culturally, though, Uxen had degenerated under the new Earth administration. No more criminals were thrown to the skwitch. Xwoosh lost its interest when new laws prohibited the ancient custom of executing the losing side after each game.

There was no tourist trade, for the planet was too far from the rest of the Galaxy. The commercial spaceships came only once every three months and left the same day. The two destroyers that "guarded" the planet arrived at rare intervals for fueling or

repairs, but the crew never had anything to do with the Uxenach. Local ordinance forbade the maidens of Uxen to speak to the outlanders, and the outlanders were not interested in any of the other native products.

But the last commercial spaceship had departed less than three weeks before on its regular run, and this was not one of the guard ships.

Zen reluctantly conceded to himself that he would have to investigate this situation further, if he wanted to retain his reputation for omniscience. Sometimes, in an occasional moment of self-doubt, he wondered if he weren't too much of a perfectionist, but then he rejected the thought as self-sacrilege.

Zen dutifully intensified the beam of awareness and returned it to the audience chamber where the two strange Earthmen who had come on the ship were being ushered into the presence of the king by none other than Guj, the venerable prime minister himself.

"Gentlemen," Guj beamed, his long white beard vibrating in an excess of hospitality, "His Gracious Majesty will be delighted to receive you at once."

And crossing his wrists in the secular xa, he led the way to where Uxlu the Fifteenth was seated in full regalia upon his im-

posing golden, gem-encrusted throne.

Uxlu himself, Zen admitted grudgingly, was an imposing sight to anyone who didn't know the old yio. The years — for he was a scant decade younger than Guj — had merely lent dignity to his handsome features, and he was still tall and upright.

"Welcome, Earthlings, to Uxen," King Uxlu said in the sonorous tones of the practiced public speaker. "If there is aught we can do to advance your comfort whilst you sojourn on our little planet, you have but to speak."

He did not, Zen noted with approval, rashly promise that requests would necessarily be granted. Which was fine, because the god well knew who the carrier out of requests would be — Zen the Almighty, the All-Powerful, the All-Put-Upon. . .

"Thank you, Your Majesty," the older of the two scientists said. "We merely seek a retired spot in which to conduct our researches."

"Researches, eh?" the king repeated with warm interest. "Are you perhaps scientists?"

"Yes, Your Majesty." Every one of Zen's perceptors quivered expectantly. Earth science was banned on Uxen, with the result that its acquisition had become the golden dream of every Uxena,

including, of course, their god.

The older scientist gave a stiff bow. "I am an anthropologist. My name is Kendrick, Professor Alpheus Kendrick. My assistant, Dr. Peter Hammond —" he indicated the tall young man with him — "is a physicist."

THE king and the prime minister conferred together in whispers. Zen wished he could join them, but he couldn't materialize on that plane without incense, and he preferred his subjects not to know that he could be invisibly present, especially on his day off. Of course, his Immaterial Omnipresence was a part of the accepted dogma, but there is a big difference between accepting a concept on a basis of faith or of proven fact.

"Curious researches," the king said, emerging from the conference, "that require both physics *and* anthropology."

"Yes," said Kendrick. "They are rather involved at that." Peter Hammond shuffled his feet.

"Perhaps some of our technicians might be of assistance to you," the king suggested. "They may not have your science, but they are very adept with their hands. . ."

"Our researches are rather limited in scope," Kendrick assured him. "We can do everything need-

ful quite adequately ourselves. All we need is a place in which to do it."

"You shall have our own second-best palace," the king said graciously. "It has both hot and cold water laid on, as well as central heating."

"We've brought along our own collapsible laboratory-dwelling," Kendrick explained. "We just want a spot to set it up."

Uxlu sighed. "The royal parks are at your disposal. You will undoubtedly require servants?"

"We have a robot, thanks."

"A robot is a mechanical man who does all our housework," Hammond, more courteous than his superior, explained. Zen wondered how he could ever have felt a moment's uneasiness concerning these wonderful strangers.

"Zen will be interested to hear of this," the prime minister said cannily. He and the king nodded at one another.

"Who did you say?" Kendrick asked eagerly.

"Zen the Terrible," the king repeated, "Zen the All-Powerful, Zen the Encyclopedic. Surely you have heard of him?" he asked in some surprise. "He's Uxen's own particular, personal and private god, exclusive to our planet."

"Yes, yes, of course I've heard about him," Kendrick said, trem-

bling with hardly repressed excitement.

*What a correct attitude! Zen thought. One rarely finds such religious respect among foreigners.*

"In fact, I've heard a great deal about him and I should like to know even more!" Kendrick spoke almost reverently.

"He is an extremely interesting divinity," the king replied complacently. "And if your robot cannot teleport or requires a hand with the heavy work, do not hesitate to call on Zen the Accommodating. We'll detail a priest to summon —"

"The robot manages very well all by itself, thank you," Kendrick said quickly.

**I**N HIS hideaway, the material body of Zen breathed a vast multiple sigh of relief. He was getting to like these Earthmen more and more by the minute.

"Might I inquire," the king asked, "into the nature of your researches?"

"An investigation of the prevalent nuclear ritual beliefs on Uxen in relation to the over-all matrix of social culture, and we really must get along and see to the unloading of the ship. Good-by, Your Majesty . . . Your Excellency." And Kendrick dragged his protesting aide off.

"If only," said the king, "I were

still an absolute monarch, I would teach these Earthlings some manners." His face grew wistful. "Well I remember how my father would have those who crossed him torn apart by wild skwitch."

"If you did have the Earthlings torn apart by wild skwitch, Sire," Guj pointed out, "then you would certainly never be able to obtain any information from them."

Uxlu sighed. "I would merely have them torn apart a little — just enough so that they would answer a few civil questions." He sighed again. "And, supposing they did happen to — er — pass on, in the process, think of the tremendous lift to my ego. But nobody thinks of the king's ego any more these days."

No, things were not what they had been since the time the planet had been retrieved by the Earthlings. They had not communicated with Uxen for so many hundreds of years, they had explained, because, after a more than ordinarily disastrous war, they had lost the secret of space travel for centuries.

Now, wanting to make amends for those long years of neglect, they immediately provided that the Earth language and the Earth income tax become mandatory upon Uxen. The language was taught by recordings. Since the Uxenach were a highly intelligent

people, they had all learned it quickly and forgotten most of their native tongue except for a few untranslatable concepts.

"Must be a new secret atomic weapon they're working on," Uxlu decided. "Why else should they come to such a remote corner of the Galaxy? And you will recall that the older one — Kendrick — said something about nuclear beliefs. If only we could discover what it is, secure it for ourselves, perhaps we could defeat the Earthmen, drive them away —" he sighed for the third time that morning — "and rule the planet ourselves."

JUST then the crown princess Iximi entered the throne room. Iximi really lived up to her title of Most Fair and Exalted, for centuries of selective breeding under which the kings of Uxen had seized the loveliest women of the planet for their wives had resulted in an outstanding pulchritude. Her hair was as golden as the ripe fruit that bent the boughs of the iolo tree, and her eyes were bluer than the uriz stones on the belt girdling her slender waist. Reproductions of the famous portrait of her which hung in the great hall of the palace were very popular on calendars.

"My father grieves," she ob-

served, making the secular xa. "Pray tell your unworthy daughter what sorrow racks your noble bosom."

"Uxen is a backwash," her father mourned. "A planet forgotten, while the rest of the Galaxy goes by. Our ego has reached its nadir."

"Why did you let yourself be conquered?" the princess retorted scornfully. "Ah, had I been old enough to speak then, matters would be very different today!" Although she seemed too beautiful to be endowed with brains, Iximi had been graduated from the Royal University with high honors.

Zen the Erudite was particularly fond of her, for she had been his best student in Advanced Theology. She was, moreover, an ardent patriot and leader of the underground Moolai (free) Uxen movement, with which Zen was more or less in sympathy, since he felt Uxen belonged to him and not to the Earthlings. After all, he had been there first.

"Let ourselves be conquered!" Her father's voice rose to a squeak. "Let ourselves! Nobody asked us — we were conquered."

"True, But we could at least have essayed our strength against the conquerors instead of capitulating like yioch. We could have

fought to the last man!"

"A woman is always ready to fight to the last man," Guj commented.

"Did you hear that, ancient and revered parent! He called me, a princess of the blood, a — a woman!"

"We are all equal before Zen," Guj said sententiously, making the high xa.

"Praise Zen," Uxlu and Iximi chanted perfunctorily, bowing low.

Iximi, still angry, ordered Guj—who was also high priest—to start services. Kindling the incense in the hajen, he began the chant.

Of course it was his holiday, but Zen couldn't resist the appeal of the incense. Besides he was there anyway, so it was really no trouble, *no trouble*, he thought, greedily sniffing the delicious aroma, *at all*. He materialized a head with seven nostrils so that he was able to inhale the incense in one delectable gulp. Then, "No prayers answered on Thursday," he said, and disappeared. That would show them!

"Drat Zen and his days off!" The princess was in a fury. "Very well, we'll manage without Zen the Spiteful. Now, precisely what is troubling you, worthy and undeservedly Honored Parent?"

"Those two scientists who ar-

rived from Earth. Didn't you meet them when you came in?"

"No, Respected Father," she said, sitting on the arm of the throne. "I must have just missed them. What are they like?"

**H**E TOLD her what they were like in terms not even a monarch should use before his daughter. "And these squuch," he concluded, "are undoubtedly working on a secret weapon. If we had it, we could free Uxen."

"Moolai Uxen!" the princess shouted, standing up. "My friends, must we continue to submit to the yoke of the tyrant? Arise. Smite the . . ."

"Anyone," said Guj, "can make a speech."

The princess sat on the steps of the throne and pondered. "Obviously we must introduce a spy into their household to learn their science and turn it to our advantage."

"They are very careful, those Earthlings," Guj informed her superciliously. "It is obvious that they do not intend to let any of us come near them."

The princess gave a knowing smile. "But they undoubtedly will need at least one menial to care for their dwelling. I shall be that menial. I, Iximi, will so demean myself for the sake of my planet! Moolai Uxen!"

"You cannot do it, Iximi," her father said, distressed. "You must not defile yourself so. I will not hear of it!"

"And besides," Guj interposed, "they will need no servants. All their housework is to be done by their robot — a mechanical man that performs all menial duties. And you, Your Royal Highness, could not plausibly disguise yourself as a machine."

"No-o-o-o, I expect not." The princess hugged the rosy knees revealed by her brief tunic and thought aloud, "But . . . just . . . supposing . . . something . . . went wrong with the robot. . . They do not possess another?"

"They referred only to one, Highness," Guj replied reluctantly. "But they may have the parts with which to construct another."

"Nonetheless, it is well worth the attempt," the princess declared. "You will cast a spell on the robot, Guj, so that it stops."

He sighed. "Very well, Your Highness; I suppose I could manage that!"

Making the secular xa, he left the royal pair. Outside, his voice could be heard bellowing in the anteroom, "Has any one of you squuch seen my pliers?"

"There is no need for worry, Venerated Ancestor," the princess assured the monarch. "All-

Helpful Zen will aid me with my tasks."

Far away in his arcane retreat, the divinity groaned to himself.

**A**NOTHER aspect of Zen's personality followed the two Earthmen as they left the palace to supervise the erection of their prefab by the crew of the spaceship in one of the Royal Parks. A vast crowd of Uxenach gathered to watch the novelty, and among them there presently appeared a sinister-looking old man with a red beard, whom Zen the Pansophic had no difficulty in recognizing as the prime minister, heavily disguised. Of course it would have been no trouble for Zen to carry out Guj's mission for him, but he believed in self-help — especially on Thursdays.

"You certainly fixed us up fine!" Hammond muttered disrespectfully to the professor. "You should've told the king we were inventing a vacuum cleaner or something. Now they'll just be more curious than ever. . . And I still don't see why you refused the priest. Seems to me he'd be just what you needed."

"Yes, and the first to catch on to why we're here. We mustn't antagonize the natives; these closed groups are so apt to resent any investigation into their mythos."

"If it's all mythical, why do you need a scientist then?"

"A physical scientist, you mean," Kendrick said austere. "For anthropology is a science, too, you know."

Peter snorted.

"Some Earthmen claim actually to have seen these alleged manifestations," Kendrick went on to explain, "in which case there must be some kind of mechanical trickery involved — which is where you come in. Of course I would have preferred an engineer to help me, but you were all I could get from the government."

"And you wouldn't have got me either, if the Minister of Science didn't have it in for me!" Peter said irately. "I'm far too good for this piddling little job, and you know it. If it weren't for envy in high places —"

"Better watch out," the professor warned, "or the Minister might decide you're too good for science altogether, and you'll be switched to a position more in keeping with your talents — say, as a Refuse Removal Agent."

*And what is wrong with the honored art of Refuse Removal?* Zen wondered. There were a lot of mystifying things about these Earthmen.

THE scientists' quaint little edifice was finally set up, and the spaceship took its departure. It was only then that the Earthmen discovered that something they called cigarettes couldn't be found in the welter of packages, and that the robot wouldn't cook dinner or, in fact, do anything. *Good old Guj*, Zen thought.

"I can't figure out what's gone wrong," Peter complained, as he finished putting the mechanical man together again. "Everything seems to be all right, and yet the damned thing won't function."

"Looks as if we'll have to do the housework ourselves, con-found it!"

"Uh-uh," Peter said. "You can, but not me. The Earth government put me under your orders so far as this project is concerned, sir, but I'm not supposed to do anything degrading, sir, and menial work is classified as just that, sir, so —"

"All right, all right!" Kendrick said. "Though it seems to me if I'm willing to do it, you should have no objection."

"It's your project, sir. I gathered from the king, though," Peter added more helpfully, "that some of the natives still do menial labor themselves."

"How disgusting that there should still be a planet so backward that human beings should

be forced to do humiliating tasks," Kendrick said.

*You don't know the half of it, either*, Zen thought, shocked all the way back to his physical being. It had never occurred to him that the functions of gods on other planets might be different than on Uxen . . . unless the Earthlings failed to pay reverence to their own gods, which seemed unlikely in view of the respectful way with which Professor Kendrick had greeted the mention of Zen's Awe-Inspiring Name. Then Refuse Removal was not necessarily a divine prerogative.

*Those first colonists were very clever*, Zen thought bitterly, *sweet-talking me into becoming a god and doing all their dirty work. I was happy here as the Only Inhabitant; why did I ever let those interlopers involve me in Theolatri? But I can't quit now. The Uxenach need Me . . . and I need incense; I'm fettered by my own weakness. Still, I have the glimmerings of an idea. . .*

"Oh, how much could a half-witted menial find out?" Peter demanded. "Remember, it's either a native servant, sir, or you do the housework yourself."

"All right," Kendrick agreed gloomily. "We'll try one of the natives."



SO THE next day, still attended by the Unseen Presence of Zen, they sought audience with the prime minister.

"Welcome, Earthmen, to the humble apartments of His Majesty's most unimportant subject," Guj greeted them, making a very small xa as he led them into the largest reception room.

Kendrick absently ran his finger over the undercarving of a small gold table. "Look, no dust," he whispered. "Must have excellent help here."

Zen couldn't help preening just a bit. At least he did his work well; no one could gainsay that.

"Your desire," Guj went on, apparently anxious to get to the point, "is my command. Would you like a rojh of dancing girls to perform before you or —?"

"The king said something yesterday about servants' being available," Kendrick interrupted. "And our robot seems to have broken down. Could you tell us where we could get someone to do our housework?"

An expression of vivid pleasure illuminated the prime minister's venerable countenance. "By fortunate chance, gentlemen, a small lot of maids is to be auctioned off at a village very near the Imperial City tomorrow. I should be delighted to escort you there personally."

"Auctioned?" Kendrick repeated. "You mean they *sell* servants here?"

Guj raised his snowy eyebrows. "Sold? Certainly not; they are leased for two years apiece. After all, if you have no lease, what guarantee do you have that your servants will stay after you have trained them? None whatsoever."

When the two scientists had gone, Iximi emerged from behind a bright-colored tapestry depicting Zen in seven hundred and fifty-three of his Attributes.

"The younger one is not at all bad-looking," she commented, patting her hair into place. "I do like big blond men. Perhaps my task will not be as unpleasant as I fancied."

Guj stroked his beard. "How do you know the Earthlings will select *you*, Your Highness? Many other maids will be auctioned off at the same time."

The princess stiffened angrily. "They'll pick me or they'll never leave Uxen alive and you, Your Excellency, would not outlive them."

ALTHOUGH it meant he had to overwork the other aspects of his multiple personality, Zen kept one free so that the next day he could join the Earthmen — in spirit, that was — on their excursion in search of a menial.

"If, as an anthropologist, you are interested in local folkways, Professor," Guj remarked graciously, as he and the scientists piled into a scarlet, boat-shaped vehicle, "you will find much to attract your attention in this quaint little planet of ours."

"Are the eyes painted on front of the car to ward off demons?" Kendrick asked.

"Car? Oh, you mean the yio!" Guj patted the forepart of the vehicle. It purred and fluttered long eyelashes. "We breed an especially bouncy strain with seats; they're so much more comfortable, you know."

"You mean this is a *live* animal?"

Guj nodded apologetically. "Of course it does not go very fast. Now if we had the atomic power drive, such as your spaceships have —"

"You'd shoot right off into space," Hammond assured him.

"Speed," said Kendrick, "is the curse of modern civilization. Be glad you still retain some of the old-fashioned graces here on Uxen. You see," he whispered to his assistant, "a clear case of magico-religious culture-freezing, resulting in a static society unable to advance itself, comes of its implicit reliance upon the powers of an omnipotent deity."

Zen took some time to figure

this out. *But that's right!* he concluded, in surprise.

"I thought your god teleported things?" Peter asked Guj. "How come he doesn't teleport you around, if you're in such a hurry to go places?"

Kendrick glared at him. "Please remember that I'm the anthropologist," he hissed. "You have got to know how to describe the Transcendental Personality with the proper respect."

"We don't have Zen teleported animate objects," the prime minister explained affably. "Or even inanimate ones if they are fragile. For He tends to lose His Temper sometimes when He feels that He is overworked —" *Feels, indeed!* Zen said to himself — "and throws things about. We cannot reprove Him for His misbehavior. After all, a god is a god."

"The apparent irreverence," Kendrick explained in an undertone, "undoubtedly signifies that he is dealing with ancillary or, perhaps, peripheral religious beliefs. I must make a note of them." He did so.

**BY** THE time the royal yio had arrived at the village where the planetary auctions for domestics were held, the maids were already arranged in a row on the platform. Most were depressingly plain creatures and



dressed in thick sacklike tunics. Among them, the graceful form of Iximi was conspicuous, clad in a garment similar in cut but fashioned of translucent gauze almost as blue as her eyes.

Peter straightened his tie and assumed a much more cheerful expression. "Let's rent *that* one!" he exclaimed, pointing to the princess.

"Nonsense!" Kendrick told him. "In the first place, she is obviously the most expensive model. Secondly, she would be

too distracting for you. And, finally, a pretty girl is never as good a worker as a plain... We'll take that one." The professor pointed to the dumpiest and oldest of the women. "How much should I offer to start, Your Excellency? No sense beginning the bidding too high. We Earthmen aren't made of money, in spite of what the rest of the Galaxy seems to think."

"A hundred credits is standard," Guj murmured. "However, sir, there is one problem — have



you considered how you are going to communicate with your maid?"

"Communicate? Are they mutes?"

"No, but very few of these women speak Earth." A look of surprise flitted over the faces of the servants, vanishing as her royal highness glared at them.

Kendrick pursed thin lips. "I was under the impression that the Earth language was mandatory on Uxen."

"Oh, it is; it is, indeed!" Guj

said hastily. "However, it is so hard to teach these backward peasants new ways." One of the backward peasants gave a loud sniff, which changed to a squeal as she was honored with a pinch from the hand of royalty. "But you will not betray us? We are making rapid advances and before long we hope to make Earth universal."

"Of course we won't," Peter put in, before Kendrick had a chance to reply. "What's more, I don't see why the Uxenians

shouldn't be allowed to speak their own language."

The princess gave him a dazzling smile. "Moolai Uxen! We must not allow the beautiful Uxulk tongue to fall into desuetude. Bring back our lovely language!"

Guj gestured desperately. She tossed her head, but stopped.

"Please, Kendrick," Peter begged, "we've got to buy that one!"

"Certainly not. You can see she's a troublemaker. Do you speak Earth?" the professor demanded of the maid he had chosen.

"No speak," she replied.

Peter tugged at his superior's sleeve. "That one speaks Earth."

Kendrick shook him off. "Do you speak Earth?" he demanded of the second oldest and ugliest. She shook her head. The others went through the same procedure.

"It looks," Peter said, grinning, "as if we'll have to take mine."

"I suppose so," Kendrick agreed gloomily, "but somehow I feel no good will come of this."

Zen wondered whether Earthmen had powers of precognition.

No one bid against them, so they took a two-year lease on the crown princess for the very reasonable price of a hundred credits, and drove her home with them.

Iximi gazed at the little prefab with disfavor. "But why are we halting outside this gluu hutch, masters?"

Guj cleared his throat. "Sirs, I wish you joy." He made the secular xa. "Should you ever be in need again, do not hesitate to get in touch with me at the palace." And, climbing into the yio, he was off.

THE others entered the small dwelling. "That little trip certainly gave me an appetite," Kendrick said, rubbing his hands together. "Iximi, you had better start lunch right away. This is the kitchen."

Iximi gazed around the cubicle with disfavor. "Truly it is not much," she observed. "However, masters, if you will leave me, I shall endeavor to do my poor best."

"Let me show you —" Peter began, but Kendrick interrupted.

"Leave the girl alone, Hammond. She must be able to cook, if she's a professional servant. We've wasted the whole morning as it is; maybe we can get something done before lunch."

Iximi closed the door, got out her portable altar — all members of the royal family were qualified members of the priesthood, though they seldom practiced — and in a low voice, for the door

and walls were thin, summoned Zen the All-Capable.

The god sighed as he materialized his head. "I might have known you would require Me. What is your will, oh Most Fair?"

"I have been ordered to prepare the strangers' midday repast, oh Puissant One, and I know not what to do with all this *ukh*, which they assure me is their food." And she pointed scornfully to the cans and jars and packages.

"How should *I* know then?" Zen asked unguardedly.

The princess looked at him. "Surely Zen the All-Knowing jests?"

"Er — yes. Merely having My Bit of Fun, you know." He hastily inspected the exterior of the alleged foods. "There appear to be legends inscribed upon the containers. Perchance, were we to read them, they might give a clue as to their contents."

"Oh, Omniscient One," the princess exclaimed, "truly You are Wise and Sapient indeed, and it is I who was the fool to have doubted for so much as an instant."

"Oh you doubted, did you?" Terrible Zen frowned terribly. "Well, see that it doesn't happen again." He had no intention of losing his divine authority at this stage of the game.

"Your Will is mine, All-Wise One. And I think You had best materialize a few pair of arms as well as Your August and Awe-Inspiring Countenance, for there is much work to be done."

SINCE the partitions were thin, Zen and the princess could hear most of the conversation in the main room. ". . . First thing to do," Kendrick's voice remarked, "is find out whether we're permitted to attend one of their religious ceremonies, where Zen is said to manifest himself actually and not, it is contended, just symbolically. . ."

"The stove is here, Almighty," the princess suggested, "not against the door where you are pressing Your Divine Ear."

"Shhh. What I hear is fraught with import for the future of the planet. Moolai Uxen."

"Moolai Uxen," the princess replied automatically.

". . . I wonder how hard it'll be to crash the services," Kendrick went on. "Most primitives don't like outsiders present at their ritual activities."

"Especially if there *are* actual manifestations of their god," Hammond contributed. "That would mean the priests are up to some sort of trickery, and they wouldn't care to run the risk of having us see through —"

He was interrupted by a loud crash from the kitchen.

"Are you all right, Iximi!" he yelled. "Need any help?"

"All is well!" she called back. "But, I pray you, do not enter, masters. The reverberation was part of a rite designed to deflect evil spirits from the food. Were a heretic to be present or interrupt the ceremonies, the spell would be voided and the food contaminated."

"Okay!" Peter returned and, in a lower tone, which he probably thought she could not overhear, "Seems you were right."

"Naturally." There was complacency in the professor's voice. "And now let us consider the validating features of the social structure as related to the mythos — and, of course, the ethos, where the two are not coincident — of the Uxenians. . ."

"Imagine," Zen complained in the kitchen, "accusing *Me* of being a mere trick of the priesthood — Supreme *Me*!"

"Supreme Butterfingers!" the princess snapped, irritation driving her to the point of sacrilege. "You spilled that red stuff, the . . ." she bent over to read the legend on the container ". . . the ketchup all over the floor!"

"The floor is relatively clean," Zen murmured abstractedly. "We can scoop up the substance and

incorporate it in whatever dainty dish we prepare for the Earthlings' repast. Now they'll think that I, Zen the Accessible, am difficult to have audience with," he mourned, "whereas I was particularly anxious to hold converse with them and discover what quest brings them to Uxen. That is," he added hastily, remembering he was omniscient, "just how they would justify its rationale."

"Shall we get on with our culinary activities, Almighty One?" Iximi asked coldly.

If the Most Fair and Exalted had a flaw, Zen thought, it was a one-track mind.

"WHAT in hell did you put in this, Iximi?" Kendrick demanded, after one taste of the steaming casserole of food which she had set proudly before the two Earthmen.

"Ketchup, that's for sure. . ." Peter murmured, rolling a mouthful around his tongue as he sought to separate its component flavors. "And rhubarb, I should say."

"Dried fish and garlic. . ." Kendrick made further identifications.

"And a comestible called marshmallow," Iximi beamed. "You like it? I am so glad!"

"I do *not* —" Kendrick began,

but Peter intervened.

"It's very nice, Iximi," he said tactfully, "but I guess we're just used to old run-of-the-mill Earth cooking. It's all our fault; we should have given you a recipe."

"I had a recipe," Iximi returned. "It came to me by Divine Inspiration."

Kendrick compressed his lips.

"Useful sort of divinity they have around here," Peter said. "Everything that goes wrong seems to take place in the name of religion. Are you sure you didn't happen to overhear us talking before, Iximi?"

"Don't be silly, Hammond!" Kendrick snapped. "These simple primitives do not have the sophistication to use their religious beliefs consciously as rationalization for their incompetence."

"Even had I wished to eavesdrop," Iximi said haughtily, "I would hardly have had the opportunity; I was too busy trying to prepare a palatable repast for you and —" her voice broke — "you didn't like it."

"Oh, I did like it, Iximi!" Peter protested. "It's just that I'm allergic to rhubarb."

"Wait!" she exclaimed, smiling again. "For dessert I have an especial surprise for you." She brought in a dish triumphantly. "Is this not just how you have it on Earth?"

"Stewed cigarettes with whipped cream," Kendrick muttered. "Stewed cigarettes! Where on Ear — on Uxen did you find them?"

"In a large box with the other puddings," she beamed. "Is it not highly succulent and flavorful?"

The two scientists sprang from their chairs and dashed into the kitchen. Iximi stared after them. When they returned, they looked much more cheerful. They seated themselves, and soon fragrant clouds of smoke began to curl toward the ceiling.

*They are calling me at last, Zen thought happily, and with such delightful incense! Who wants chants anyway?*

"But what are you *doing*!" the princess shrieked.

ZEN hastened to manifest himself, complete with fourteen nostrils, before she could spoil everything. "The procedure is most unorthodox," he murmured aloud, "but truly this new incense has a most delicious aroma, extremely pleasing to My Ego. What is your will, oh, strangers?"

"All-Merciful Zen," the princess pleaded, "forgive them, for they knew not what they did. They did not mean to summon You."

"Then who," asked Zen in a terrible voice, "is this wonderful



smoke for? Some foreign god whom they worship on My Territory?" And he wouldn't put it past them either.

Peter looked at the anthropologist, but Kendrick was obviously too paralyzed with fright to speak. "As a matter of fact, Your — er — Omnipotence," the physicist said haltingly, "this is not part of our religious ritual. We burn this particular type of incense which we call tobacco, for our own pleasure."

"In other words," Zen said coldly, "you worship yourselves. I work and slave My Godhood to the bone only to have egotists running all over My Planet."

"No, it's nothing like that at all," Kendrick quavered. "We smoke the tobacco to — well — gratify our appetites. Like — like eating, you know."

"Well, you will have to forego that pleasure," Zen said, frowning terribly. Even the tall one cowered, he noted with appreciation. It had been a long time since people had really cringed before his frown. The Uxenach had come to take him too much for granted; they would learn their mistake. "From now on," he said portentously, "the tobacco must be reserved for My Use alone. Smoke it only for purposes of worship. Once a day will be sufficient," he added graciously,

"and perhaps twice on holy days."

"But we do not worship alien gods," Kendrick persisted in a shaky voice. "Even if you were a god. . ."

Zen frowned. "Would you care to step outside and test my divinity?"

"Well, no . . . but . . ."

"Then, as far as you're concerned, I am Divine, and let's have no more quibbling. Don't forget the tobacco once a day. About time I had a change from that low-grade incense."



He vanished. Too late he remembered that he'd planned to ask the Earthlings why they had come to Uxen, and to discuss a little business proposition with them. Oh, well, time for that at his next materialization for them. And, now that he considered the matter, the direct approach might very well be a mistake.

He hoped Iximi would make sure they burned him tobacco regularly — really good stuff; almost made godhood worthwhile. But then he'd felt that way about

incense at first. No, he had other ideas for making divinity worthwhile, and Iximi was going to help him, even if she didn't know it. People had used him long enough; it was his turn to use them.

**I**N THE kitchen, Iximi recalled Zen and together they washed the dishes and listened to the scientists quarreling in the next room.

"You will note the use of incense as standard socio-religious



parallelism, Hammond. Men have appetites that must be gratified and so they feel their supreme being must also eat . . . only, being a deity, he consumes aromas."

"Yes," Peter said. "You explained all that to Him much more succinctly, though."

"Hah! Well, have you any idea yet as to how the trick was worked?"

"Worked? What do you mean?"

"How they made that talking image appear? Clever device, I must say, although the Scoomps of Aldebaran III —"

"Didn't look like a trick to me."

"That's a fine young man," Zen said approvingly to Iximi. "I like him."

"You really do, Most High? I am so glad!"

"You don't mean you really believe this Zen is an actual living god?" Kendrick spluttered.

There was a silence. "No, not a god," Peter said finally, "but not a human, either. Perhaps another life-form with attributes different from ours. After all, do we know who or what was on Uxen, before it was colonized by Earth?"

"Tcha!" Kendrick said.

Iximi looked at Zen. Zen looked at Iximi. "The concept of godhood varies from society to society," the divinity told the

princess. "Peter is not being sacrilegious, just manifesting a healthy skepticism."

"You're a credulous fool," Kendrick said hotly to his assistant. "I don't blame the Secretary for demoting you. When we return to Earth, I shall recommend your transfer to Refuse Removal. You have no business at all in Science!"

There was the sound of footsteps. "Leaving my noxious company?" Peter's voice asked tightly.

"I am going out to the nearest temple to have a chat with one of the priests. I can expect more sensible answers from him than from you!" The outside door slammed.

"Speaking of Refuse Removal, Almighty," Iximi said to Zen, "would you teleport the remains of this miserable repast to the Sacred Garbage Dump? And you need not return; I'll be able to handle the rest myself."

"Moolai Uxen," Zen reminded her and vanished with the garbage, but, although the refuse was duly teleported, the unseen, impalpable presence of the god remained.

THE door to the kitchen opened, and Hammond walked in, his face grim. "Need any help, Iximi?" he asked, not very

graciously. "Or should I say 'Your Royal Highness?'"

Iximi dropped a plate which, fortunately, was plastic. "How did you know who I was?"

He sat down on a stool. "Didn't you remember that your portrait hung in the great hall of the palace?"

"Of course," she said, chagrined. "A portrait of a servant would hardly be hung there."

"Not only that, but I asked whom it depicted. Do you think I wouldn't notice the picture of such a beautiful girl?"

"But if you knew, why then did you. . . ?"

He grinned. "I realized you were up to no good, and I have no especial interest in the success of Kendrick's project."

Iximi carefully dried a dish. "And what is his project?"

"To investigate the mythos of the allegedly corporeal divinity in static primitive societies, with especial reference to the god-concept of Zen on Uxen."

"Is that all?"

All! Zen thought. *Sounds like an excellent subject for research to me. Unfortunate that I cannot possibly let the study be completed, as I am going to invalidate the available data very shortly.*

"That's all, Iximi."

"And how is it that Professor

Kendrick did not recognize me from the picture?"

"Oh, he never notices girls' pictures. He's a complete idiot. . . You overheard us just now? When we get back to Earth, I'm going to be a garbage collector."

"Here on Uxen, Refuse Removal is a Divine Prerogative," Iximi remarked.

"Poor Zen, whatever he is," Peter said to himself. "But a god, being a god," he went on in a louder voice, "can raise himself above the more sordid aspects of the job. As a mere human, I cannot. Iximi, I wonder if. . ." He looked nervously at his watch. "I hope Kendrick takes his time."

"He will not return soon," Iximi told him, putting away the dish towel. "Not if he is determined to find a temple. Because there are no temples. Zen is a god of the Hearth and Home."

"Iximi," Peter said, getting up and coming closer to her, "isn't there some way I can stay here on Uxen, some job I can fill? You're the crown princess — you must have a drag with the civil service." He looked at her longingly. "Oh, if only you weren't so far above me in rank."

"Listen, Peter!" She caught his hands. "If you were the Royal Physicist, our ranks would not be so far disparate. My distinguished

father would make you a duke. And princesses have often . . ." she blushed ". . . that is to say, dukes are considered quite eligible."

"Do you think I have a chance of becoming Royal Physicist?"

"I am certain of it." She came very close to him. "You could give us the atomic drive, design space ships . . . weapons . . . for us, couldn't you, darling?"

"I could." He looked troubled. "But it's one thing to become an extraterrestrial, another to betray my own world."

Iximi put her arms around him. "But Uxen will be your world, Peter. As prince consort, you would no longer be concerned with the welfare of the Earthlings."

"Yes, but . . ."

"And where is there betrayal? We do not seek to conquer Earth or its colonies. All we want is to regain our own freedom. We are entitled to freedom, aren't we, Peter?"

He nodded slowly. "I . . . suppose so."

"Moolai Uxen." She thrust a package of cigarettes into his hand. "Let us summon the Almighty One to bless our betrothal."

Peter obediently lit two cigarettes and gave one to her.

ZEN materialized his head. "Blessings on you, my children," he said, sniffing ecstatically, "and welcome, Holy Chief Physicist, to My Service."

"Royal Chief Physicist," Iximi corrected.

"No, that is insufficient for his merits. Holy and Sacrosanct Chief Physicist is what he will be, with the rank of prince. You will have the honor of serving Terrible Zen Myself, Peter Hammond."

"Delighted," said the young man dubiously.

"You will construct robots that do housework, vehicles that carry refuse to the Sacred Garbage Dump, vans that transport household goods, machines that lave dishes. . ."

"Will do," Peter said with obvious relief. "And may I say, Your — er — Benignness, that it will be a pleasure to serve You?"

"But the atomic power drive . . . freedom?" Iximi stammered.

"These will point the surer, shorter way to the true freedom. My Omnidynamism has stood in the way of your cultural advancement, as Professor Kendrick will undoubtedly be delighted to explain to you."

"But, Your Omnipotence. . ."

"Let us have no more discussion. I am your God and I know best."

"Yes, Supreme One," Iximi said sullenly.

"You Uxenach have kept Me so busy for thousands of years, I have had no time for My Divine Meditations. I shall now withdraw Myself from mundane affairs."

The princess forgot disappointment in anxiety. "You will not leave us, Zen?"

"No, My child, I shall be always present, watching over My People, guiding them, ready to help them in case of emergency. But make sure I am not summoned save in case of dire need. No more baby-sitting, mind you."

"Yes, Almighty One."

"The incense will continue to be offered to me daily by everyone who seeks My Sacred Ear, and make sure to import a large quantity of this tobacco from Earth for holy days . . . and other occasions," he added casually, "when you wish to be especially sure of incurring My Divine Favor. And I wish to be worshipped in temples like other gods." *Less chance of my being stuck with some unexpected household task.* "I shall manifest Myself on Thursdays only," he concluded gleefully, struck by the consummate idea. "Thursday will be My Day to work and your holy day. All other days you will work, and I will indulge in Divine Medita-

tion. I have spoken."

And he withdrew all aspects of his personality to his retreat to wallow in the luxury of six days off per week. Naturally, to make sure the Uxenach kept the incense up to scratch, he would perform a small miracle now and again to show he was still Omnipresent.

Being a god, he thought as he made himself more comfortable, was not a bad thing at all. One merely needed to learn how to go about it in the right way.

—EVELYN E. SMITH

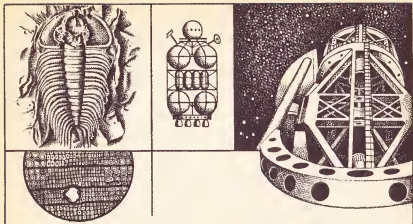
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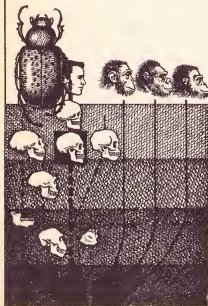
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## for your information

By WILLY LEY

KONSTANTIN ANKLITZEN  
ALIAS FRIAR BERTHOLDUS



**T**HE CITY chronicle of a West German city — Ulm, if I remember correctly — contains a simply wonderful entry, written by an unknown hand around the year 1380. It reads: "A knight came and besieged the town and shot at it with thunder guns. It did no harm."

There are several things about this short entry that I find interesting.

One is that the knight who be-

sieged the town was not even mentioned by name, apparently a little siege now and then being quite commonplace. I have the feeling that this one may not have been mentioned at all if it had not been for the thunder gun.

The second interesting point is, of course, that it was the knight who sported the thunder gun and not the city. The customary explanation is that the knights were opposed to firearms as a principle of knightly honor. Though their reasoning may have been faulty, they at least allegedly displayed good judgment because firearms supposedly ended knighthood. Well, the firearms *did* contribute at a later date, when they had grown into siege guns, but even then mostly for the reason that the rich cities could afford siege guns while the knights could not.

THE third interesting point is that this ineffective shooting took place in the very year in which, according to an entrenched belief, bolstered by a load of old books and manuscripts, guns and gunpowder were invented by the monk Berthold Schwarz, who was a member of a monastery in or near the city of Freiburg in the Breisgau.

Many of the manuscripts solemnly added that "said Berthold

was executed from life to death because of his invention of this art in 1388 A.D." — after which they proceeded without noticeable scruples to teach apprentices how to purify saltpeter, mix gunpowder and cast cannon.

But when the city of Freiburg erected a monument to the inventor in somewhat belated recognition of the passing of five centuries since his deed, the City Council, after careful deliberation and much correspondence with historical societies, had the year 1354 engraved as the year of his death on the pedestal of his monument.

Since Arabic manuscripts speak of powder and of rockets more than a century before 1380, and since Roger Bacon's famous letter in which he defended himself against the accusation of witchcraft is of equal age, and since the oldest picture of what is indubitably a firearm dates back to 1326, there was evidently something wrong with the story.

Either the mysterious monk did not live at the time mentioned in the old manuscripts, or else he was simply a legend and the statement that his name had been Konstantin Anklitzen before he joined a monastic order had been invented by a local historian of Freiburg at an early time because this and similar



names were peculiar to the Freiburg area.

Whether "Berthold Schwarz" should be considered as "Man or Myth?" was quite an issue for decades among historians, especially the military variety. While his supposed native city spent money on a public monument, a Royal Historical Commission which compiled a comprehensive Biographical Encyclopedia (the *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*) of all famous Germans resolved not to include him as being "unhistorical."

Remains of this disagreement persist to this day. In the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, the monk, spelled Berthold Schwartz, is mentioned four times (in the articles on Ammunition, Fireworks, Guns and Ordnance), but does not have an article of his own. On the other hand, *Webster's Biographical Dictionary* lists him as a historical person, merely questioning his identity "with the Franciscan, Meister (Magister) Berthold, real name Konstantin Anklitzen."

**N**EITHER authority, strangely enough, points out that Berthold Schwarz (or Schwartz) cannot have been his name, whether he lived or not.

The word *schwarz* (*schwartz*) is merely the older spelling) is

the German word for "black" and in this connection it is also a mistake. The older manuscripts, both in German and in Latin, refer to him as *Berchtholdus niger*, which means Berthold the Black. For a while, this was properly translated into German as *Berthold der Schwarze*, until somebody wrote the name as Bertholdus Niger, which then produced Berthold Schwarz. This is about as correct as translating Charlemagne's Latin name, Carolus Magnus, as Charles Grand.

Since we already know that guns did exist in 1380 and that the invention, therefore, must have been made earlier, it might be best to work our way backward from that date. Several historians of the 19th century did just that — they read their way through old city chronicles in search of mention of guns.

One, a retired German colonel by the name of A. Essenwein, found several:

In 1378, a Johann von Aarau made three guns for the city of Augsburg and instructed the patricians Johann Ilsung, Johann Vend and Johann Feinsbach in their use. The chronicle of the city of Speyer reported in 1374 that a gunnery master (not named) was paid a cash honorarium. The chronicle of Nuremberg for the year 1356 mentions

a payment to Master Blacksmith Saenger for guns and powder. The expense accounts of the city of Frankfurt on the Main were preserved beginning with the one for the year 1348; they show expenditures for the purchase of guns and gunpowder from that date on, but unfortunately do not tell where the guns and the powder were bought.

There were, however, quite a number of places, for the British historian John Upman established the mention of gunpowder mills for various cities: Augsburg had one in 1340, Spandau in 1344 and Liegnitz in 1348. The chronicle of Lübeck for the year 1360 states fairly calmly that the City Hall caught fire because of the carelessness of those *qui pulveris pro bombardis parabant* (who make the powder for the bombards).

Another British historian, Oscar Guttman, discovered not less than seven documents dealing with firearms for the period from 1344-1348, among them an invoice for gunpowder and an iron cannon bought by the city of Aachen in 1346, a document stating that the city of Cambrai bought, in 1342, ten cannon, "five of iron and five of metal" (bronze?) and several bills paid by the exchequer of King Ed-

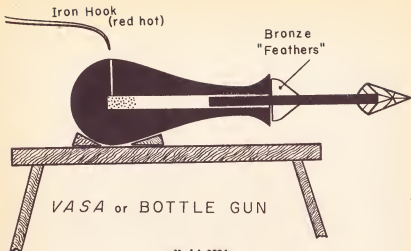
ward III of England in 1344-1347.

**I**N ADDITION to these more recent researches, the Italian historian Muratori stated that, in 1347, one Hugonino di Chatillon made four bronze cannon for the Marquise de Monferrato.

Another "document" is furnished, believe it or not, by an old natural history book. Konrad von Megenberg, Archdeacon of the cathedral of Regensburg, spent the two years of 1349-50 translating a Latin work by a French churchman into German. The original had been written almost precisely one century earlier and its author, Thomas de Cantimpré, or Thomasius Cantipratensis, had likened lightning to a missile from a *tormenta*, one of the old crossbowlike javelin-throwers. Konrad, the translator, changed that sentence to read: "like a missile from a shotgun" which, because of the noise, seemed to him a better comparison to lightning and thunder.

This not only proves that firearms existed in 1349, but also that they were sufficiently well known to be used for literary comparisons.

The oldest picture of a gun originated in England in 1326. A Walter de Milemete wrote a fairly short work "On the Duties



Model 1326

of a Prince" (*De Officiis Regum*) and the picture was used to fill an otherwise empty manuscript page. The gun is not mentioned in the text, but its type is known to historians. It was a so-called "bottle gun" or *vasa* (Figure 1), which fired darts.

From the picture, it seems as if the firing was accomplished by touching a red-hot iron hook to the touch hole. Since too much gas would leak around the shaft of the dart, it can be assumed that some wadding, probably leather, was used. The *vasa* must have been propped up with wooden wedges, but the drawing in the manuscript does not show this; it shows a bare wooden table. The gunner is shown stand-

ing off to one side, however, so they must have had experience with recoil.

Looking at the picture of a *vasa*, you find that the chronicler's sentence "it did no harm" becomes understandable. The wonder is that these weapons were not abandoned as soon as they had been invented, for they must have been awkward to carry around, difficult to serve, rather expensive and, of course, cursed with long intervals between shots. A heavy spear thrown by a strong man must have been more accurate and possibly more destructive, too.

The oldest report of the actual use of such guns is just one year older than this picture. The Eng-

lish, accompanied by Flemish soldiers, fought the Scots, and Archdeacon Babour of Aberdeen reported that the "crakys of war" were a novelty then. He added that they had not been used in an earlier battle in 1319, when the defenders of Berwick fought bravely, but "gynis for crakys had he [they] nane." In other words, they had no guns to shoot.

ONE very interesting fact is that the various places mentioning gunpowder during the preceding century do *not* mention guns. The oldest source about which there is no doubt, a Chinese chronicle, speaks of rockets and bombs on chains (and, by implication, of powder) for a war in the year 1232, without saying when these things were invented. (But a later Chinese chronicler by the name of Wuh-i-siao declared categorically that "guns came from the outer barbarians.")

Only eight years after that battle, saltpeter, the most important ingredient of powder, was known to an Arab savant with the somewhat unwieldy name of Abú Mohámmad Abdallah ben Ahmad Almaliki. He did not mention that it was used for explosive mixtures, but the name he used is indicative — he called it "Snow from China." Forty years after

that (around 1280), another Arab, Hassan el-Rammah, still called rockets *alsichem alkhatai* — "Chinese arrows."

By that time rockets had already received documentary mention in Europe; they were used in Cologne in 1258. And written prescriptions for making powder and rockets were, so to speak, all over the place.

Roger Bacon, whom his contemporaries called with awe and some uneasiness the *Doctor mirabilis*, gave these recipes in his *Epistola*, written in 1247 or 1248. Roger Bacon still disguised the information; by way of much literary padding, he made it appear as if he were describing the making of gold or the Philosopher's Stone.

But his German contemporary and counterpart, Albert von Bollstadt or Albertus Magnus (he was called the *Doctor universalis* by his contemporaries), wrote about the same things openly. Just when Albertus wrote the one of his many works in which powder and rockets are explained is not known. One could say that, since he died in 1280, it must of necessity have been earlier than that, but precise dating is unimportant, for both Roger Bacon and Albertus had their information from an older book, the *Liber ignium* ("Fire Book").

Its author, Marchus Graecus, is otherwise completely unknown. It is likely that he was just the translator of an Arabic original that is now lost. As for dating, my own guess is around 1240; it has to be early enough for Roger Bacon to read, but it is unlikely that it was prior to the time of Almaliki.

The point of all this is that, up to, say, 1280, we hear of powder and rockets and of occasional bombs, while the "gynis for crakys" suddenly appear in 1325 and are the main thing from then on. Evidently the invention of the gun falls into this interval of about half a century.

**IT WAS** around the year 1840 that an officer of the Belgian army, a Major Renard, found an entry in the chronicle of the City of Ghent. In this so-called *Memorieboek*, the entry appears under the year of 1313, but that was the fiscal year of the city, which ran from August to August. Expressed in calendar years, it comprised the second half of 1313 and the first half of 1314.

The entry reads: *Item, in dit jaer was aldereerst gevonden in Duitschland het gebruik der bussen van eenen mueninck*. In literal translation: "Furthermore, in this year was for the first time found in Germany the use of

bussen by a monk." The word *bussen* is still around in English in the word *blunderbuss* (originally Dutch *dunderbuss*, the first part of the word meaning "thunder") and in German in the word *Büchse*, which means a smooth-bore hunting piece.

In this entry, the genuineness and dating of which have stood up against all inspection, we find missing as well as known ingredients of the story stated in dry commercial language. The year of the invention falls into that gap. The country of origin is stated to be Germany, as was asserted about a century later by a whole raft of Italian historians, two Spaniards and one Greek. And the inventor is said to be a monk.

In the following years, the *Memorieboek* contains several entries about *bussen med kruyd* (bussen with powder) as an item of commerce and, soon after that, the King of England began to hire Flemish soldiers who had the "gynis for crakys."

It would be so nice if the gentlemen who wrote the *Memorieboek* had seen fit to mention the monk's name. Since he didn't, the name of "black Berthold" must have come from elsewhere, especially because that sentence in the *Memorieboek* had been forgotten until Major Renard re-

surrected it in the 19th century.

The main — but not the only — source for the name of the monk is another old book with a few mysteries of its own. Its title is simply "Fireworks Book" of which many manuscript are known and which was even printed later. But we are not certain who wrote it, for the author did not reveal his name. In his foreword, he said by way of apology that he had written down all these secrets "because there are so many things which every Master must know that one cannot remember all of them without writing."

Nor do we know just when it was written. One of the oldest manuscript copies known (MS No. 1481a of the Germanic Museum in Nuremberg, if you insist on a specific reference) was made between 1415 and 1425. Since it is known that the gunnery master Abraham von Memmingen wrote a fireworks book for his Lord, Duke Friedrich of Tyrol, in 1410, it is believed that this book, of which we only know that it was written, and the anonymous Fireworks Book of which we have so many copies are one and the same.

"THIS art," the Fireworks Book says, with reference to the art of shooting, "has been

found by a magister. His name was Magister Berthold, who was a *magister in artibus* and who dealt with Great Alchemy. . . The Magister Berthold desired to burn a gold tincture and this tincture requires saltpeter, sulfur, lead and oil, and he mixed the ingredients together in a copper vessel and after he had closed it tightly as one must do and put the vessel on the fire . . . the vessel broke into small pieces. . . Later the magister left out the oil and the lead and put charcoal into it and tried to find whether one might throw a stone that way."

This, at first glance, looks like an entirely different story. From the sources surveyed so far, we had a right to conclude that at some time around the year 1300 somebody, identified by the chronicle of Ghent as a monk in Germany, invented the gun but did not have to invent the powder because it was already well known to literate men of the time. Now the Fireworks Book says that Friar Bertholdus — whom others called Berthold the Black — invented both and did so more or less by accident while pursuing an experiment in alchemy.

We'll soon see that there is some sense to the story.

As for the experiment itself,

the alchemical reasoning has been clearly explained by the famous French historian of chemistry, Marcellin Berthelot. Mercury, which obviously was a very puzzling substance to people of that time, was believed by some to be the *prima materia*, the "original substance." Because it was that (I'm now quoting from Berthelot), "it had to be solidified first; that is, made solid and stable in fire like the other metals. Then it had to be colored by means of a coloring principle, white or yellow . . . so it would be changed into silver or gold."

Apparently it was believed that the "original substance," if left uncolored, would look black, for making it was often referred to as "preparing the blackness" — and outsiders to whom this term may have "leaked" called the whole thing the "black art." Hence Berthold the Black may very well mean Berthold the Alchemist.

A Swiss priest, Felix Hemmerlin (of course he Latinized his name, into Malleolus), who wrote, incidentally while imprisoned, around 1460 and who does not seem to have known about the purely military and somewhat secret Fireworks Book, told very much the same story.

Mercury, as everybody knows, is liquid because it is inhabited

by a basilisk that must be driven out. The alchemist Berthold (Hemmerlin does not mention that he was a monk, presumably because he had claimed earlier that "monks are dumb and lazy" and did not want to ruin his own argument) tried to do this first by heat alone and then by adding the sulphur, which is hot by Nature, and the saltpeter, which is cold by Nature, so that in the battle between the hot and the cold substance, the basilisk might be killed, too.

FOLK tale has it that Friar Bertholdus had studied at St. Blasien and that he received his degree there. It also says that his fellow monks were highly indignant (read: afraid) about his alchemical experiments and imprisoned him. And although he is said to have been a member of the Monastery of Thennenbach, which belonged to the Cistercian Order, he was later referred to as a Franciscan.

All this can easily be true. St. Blasien was the nearest seat of learning to Freiburg. That the fellow monks were afraid of explosions is understandable and if the prior imprisoned him, he only did to Berthold what other spiritual superiors did to Roger Bacon. Finally, since the Franciscans are a much stricter order than the



BERTHOLD THE BLACK

From André Thevet's work on lives of illustrious people, published in Paris in 1584.

Cistercians, it may well be that it was the punishment he finally received or, rather, the "pardon" — namely, to join a stricter order.

There is no documentary proof known, but the various events at least make a logical sequence. And if the story of the explosion because of an alchemical experiment is true, one may assume that Berthold quickly recognized what it was that had happened to him. He must have read the works of Albertus Magnus at St. Blasien and may even have met the *Doctor universalis* in person, for Albertus was an inveterate traveler.

A few words about dates must

still be added to this report.

The oldest document about firearms — if dated correctly — is an old drinking song in which each stanza tells of an improbable feat. In one, a crayfish plays on a horn; in another, a bumblebee rhapsodizes on Biblical themes; in a third, an old and toothless steer bites the heads of twelve lions off, etc. etc. One of these stanzas reads in part:

Ich sach uz einer büchsen  
schiessen, daz es nieman hört  
siben wachteln zerstört. . .

I can't translate this so that it rhymes, but line for line it reads:

I saw that with a bussen  
shooting, which nobody heard,  
seven quail destroyed

In short, everybody knew that a bussen did make noise. Now comes the difficult question of dating. The known manuscript copy was made in 1371, according to a statement on the manuscript itself. But when was it written? One other stanza reads:

The Romans already knew  
that Count Konrad's  
house in Freiburg is finished.

UNFORTUNATELY, there were three counts by that name in Freiburg. The first of



the three died in 1271, the second in 1350 and the third in 1422, which is too much of a spread. But the first of the three was instrumental in building a very special "house," the cathedral, which might well have been referred to as Count Konrad's house.

The tower of the cathedral was finished after Konrad's death, in 1296. The song must have been written fairly soon after that date — the completion of the building was news — probably within a decade or so. The song might, therefore, antedate the entry in the *Memorieboek* by a few years — logically so, for it was written in Freiburg, where Friar Bertholdus frightened his fellow monks.

But then where did "they" get the date of 1354 to put on the monument or 1388 when Bertholdus was allegedly "executed from life to death"?

The first one is simple. The Bavarian historian Johannes Thurmayer (who called himself Johannes Aventinus) found in Hemmerlin's book the statement that it took two centuries for Berthold's invention to become known. Thurmayer thought this too long and settled for one century; but Hemmerlin had not said from what year he counted backward, so Thurmayer counted from the year in which Hemmer-

lin was imprisoned, which was 1454. Don't be surprised at such carelessness. It was also Thurmayer who converted Black Berthold into Berthold Black.

The year 1380 came from the collective effort of a number of Italian authors. Although Muratori mentioned earlier dates for the use of firearms in Italy, most Italians were convinced that the weapon first appeared when Venice fought Genoa about the island of Chiozza. Their words *strumento nuovo trovato* (newly invented instrument) make it clear that they thought the invention had just been made; the war about Chiozza was over in 1381. And seven years later, the devil took the inventor — no, no, in 1388 A.D. he was executed.

To accomplish this, the story was told that Friar Bertholdus was offered and accepted a professorship in Prague. King Wenceslas, who ruled then, was known to be free with death sentences, so all that was needed from the point of view of the storyteller who wanted to do away with the inventor was to move him to Prague.

But when questioned in 1890, the head librarian of the University of Prague could name all the professors of that time. No Friar Bertholdus or Magister Bertholdus was among them. The story

of his execution was merely a story, just like the other story that he died in an explosion.

In all probability, he died a normal death. But we would like to know where and when.

### ANY QUESTIONS?

*Does any form of life exist on the Earth that is not based on carbon? I have read someplace that there is a small plant on the Antarctic continent that is based on silicon.*

Earl H. Mann  
12859 Sherman Way  
North Hollywood, Calif.

You may have read this in a story without remembering now that it was fiction and not an article. There are various life-forms that utilize silicon compounds for protective spikes, etc. Some plants get rid of silicon, which they absorbed without much need for it, by excreting it. The so-called "bamboo pearls" that caused much superstitious to-do in the past are an example. But the living tissue of all plants and animals on Earth is based on carbon.

*Perhaps this doesn't belong in GALAXY, but you may be able to settle a minor point of dispute.*

*Is there now or has there ever been a German noble family by the name of Frankenstein?*

Pfc. John M. Kilgus  
AMEDS-Det. APO 154  
c/o PM, New York

To my own surprise, the answer is yes. There exists a family of the Barons von Franckenstein — spelled with a "c," you'll note — two members of which have made the grade of being listed in "Webster's Biographical Dictionary."

The first is Georg Arbogast Baron von und zu Franckenstein (1825-1890), who was a well-known politician in his lifetime, having been the leader of the (Catholic) Centrist Party, member of the Reichstag and, for a while, vice-president of the Reichstag.

The other member of the family was (or still is) the composer Clemens Baron von Franckenstein (born 1875) who composed several operas, *Griseldis* (in 1898), *Rahab* (in 1911) and *Li Tai Pé* (in 1920).

I don't think, however, that Mary Shelley had this family in mind when she wrote *Frankenstein*. She probably just picked a typically Teutonic name.

—WILLY LEY

# Picture Bride

*As pretty as a picture? Yes,  
because that was all she was  
...or would become some day!*

By WILLIAM MORRISON

Illustrated by EMSH

**M**Y brother, Perry, always was a bit cracked. As a kid, he almost blew up our house doing experiments. When he was eighteen, he wrote poetry, but fortunately that didn't last long and he went back to science.

Now, when he showed me this picture, I figured he'd had a relapse of some kind. "This is the girl I'm in love with," he said.

She wasn't bad. Not bad at all, even if her clothes were crazy. She wasn't my type—too brainy-looking — although I could see how some guys would go for her. "I thought you liked blondes."

"I wouldn't give you two cents for all the blondes in Hollywood," he answered. "This is the only girl for me."

"You sound as if you've got it bad," I said. "You going to marry her?"

His face dropped about a mile. "I can't."

"You mean she's married already?" I was surprised. This wasn't like Perry at all.

He sort of hesitated, as if he was afraid of saying too much. "No, she isn't married. I asked her about that. But I can't marry her because — well, I've never met her. All I've seen of her is

this picture and a few more. She doesn't live here."

"You mean she's in Europe?" I've heard of these love affairs by mail, and they never made much sense to me. I said to Perry, "Why can't she come to this country?"

"Oh, there are a lot of things in the way."

It sounded worse and worse. I said, "Look, Perry, this smells like a racket to me. It's the kind of thing a couple of shrewd operators cook up to take some hick for a ride. I'm surprised at you falling for it. How do you know there really is a dame like that in Europe? Anybody can send pictures —"

"You've got it all wrong," he said. "I've spoken to her."

"By phone? How do you know who's on the other end? You hear a dame's voice you never heard before. What makes you think it's hers?"

**A** GAIN he didn't seem to want to talk, as if he had some secret to hide. But I guess he felt like gettings things off his chest, too, or he wouldn't have opened up in the first place. And he had already told me enough so that if he didn't tell me more he'd sound like a dope.

So after hesitating even longer than before, he said, "Let's get this straight, George. This is no

racket. I've seen and talked to her at the same time. And the things she talked about, no con man would know."

"You've seen and talked to her at the same time? You mean by TV? I don't believe it. They can't send TV to Europe."

"I didn't say it was TV. And I didn't say she lived in Europe."

"That's exactly what you did say. Or maybe you meant she lived on Mars?"

"No. She's an American."

"This makes less and less sense to me. Where did you meet her?"

He turned red, and squirmed all over the place. Finally he said, "Right here in my own laboratory."

"In your own laboratory! But you said you never met her in the flesh!"

"I didn't. Not really by TV either. The fact is — she isn't born yet."

I backed away from him. When he was a kid and blew up our kitchen, I didn't like it. When he wrote poetry, I was kind of ashamed and didn't want my pals to know he was my brother. Now, I was really scared. Everything he had been saying in the last ten minutes began to make sense, but a screwy kind of sense.

He saw how I felt. "Don't worry, George, I haven't gone crazy. Her time is 2973, more



than a thousand years from now. The only way I've seen and talked to her is on a time-contact machine."

"Come again?"

"A kind of time machine. It can't send material objects back and forth across time, as far as I know, but it can send certain waves, especially the kind we use to transmit signals. That's how she and I could talk to each other and see each other."

"Perry, I think you ought to see a good doctor."

"It's a remarkable device," he said, paying no attention to how I was trying to help him. "She's the one who first constructed it and contacted me. It's based on an extension of Einstein's equations —"

"You think you can explain so much," I said. "Okay, then, explain this. This dame isn't going to be born for a thousand years. And yet you tell me you're in love with her. What's the difference between you and somebody that's nuts?" I asked, as if anybody knew the answer.

**H**E certainly didn't. In fact, he went ahead and proved to me that they were the same thing. Because for the next couple of weeks, the only thing he'd talk about, outside of equations I couldn't understand, was this

dame. How smart she was, and how beautiful she was, and how wonderful she was in every way that a dame can be wonderful, and how she loved him. For a time he had me convinced that she actually existed.

"Compared with you," I said, "Romeo had a mild case."

"There are some quantities so great that you can't measure them," he said. "That will give you some idea of our love for each other."

There it went, the old poetry, cropping out in him just like before. And all the time I'd been thinking it was like measles, something that you get once and it builds up your resistance so you don't get it again, at least not bad. It just goes to show how wrong I could be.

"What preacher are you going to get to marry you?" I asked. "A guy born five hundred years from now?"

"I don't think that's funny," he said.

"You're telling me. Look, Perry, you're smart enough to know what I'm thinking —"

"You still think I'm crazy."

"I got an open mind on the subject. Now, if you won't see a doctor — then how about letting me take a look at this dame, so I can convince myself?"

"No," he said. "I've considered

doing that, and decided against it. Her voice and image come through for only about five minutes a day, sometimes less. And those minutes are very precious to us. We don't want any one else present, any one at all."

"Not even to convince me she actually exists?"

"You wouldn't be convinced anyway," he said very shrewdly. "No matter what I showed you, you'd still find a reason to call it a fraud."

He was right at that. It would take a lot of convincing to make me believe that a babe who wasn't going to get born for a thousand years was in love with him.

By this time, though, I was sure of one thing — there was something screwy going on in that laboratory of his. For five minutes a day he was watching some dame's picture, listening to her voice. If I had an idea what she was like, I might figure out where to go from there.

**I** BEGAN keeping an eye on Perry, dropping in at the laboratory to pay him visits. There was what looked like a ten-inch TV tube in one corner of his place, not housed in a cabinet, but lying on the table among dozens of other tubes and rheostats and meters and other things I

didn't know about. Along the wall that led from this corner was a lot of stuff which Perry said was high voltage, and warned me not to touch.

I kept away. I wasn't trying to figure out how to get myself killed. All I wanted to know was when he saw this girl.

Finally I managed to pin the time down to between three and four in the afternoon. For five minutes every day, during that hour, he locked the door and didn't answer phone calls. I figured that if I dropped in then I might get a glimpse of her.

And that's what I did.

At first, when I knocked on the door, there was no answer. In a minute, though, I heard Perry's voice, but he wasn't talking to me. He was saying, "Darling," and he sounded kind of sick, which I figured was due to love. Come to think of it, he might have been scared a little. I heard him say, "Don't be afraid," and it was quiet for about fifteen seconds.

Then I heard a terrific crash, like lightning striking. The door shook, and I smelled something sharp, and the first thing I wanted to do was get out of that place. But I couldn't leave my brother in there.

I put my shoulder to the door and had no trouble at all. The explosion, or whatever it was,

must have weakened the hinges. As the door crashed in, I looked for Perry.

There was no sign of him. But I could see his shoes, on the floor in front of that TV tube, where he must have been standing. No feet in them, though, just his socks. All the high-voltage stuff was smoking. The TV screen was all lit up, and on it I could see a girl's face, the same girl whose picture Perry had shown me. She was wearing one of those funny costumes, and she looked scared. It was a clear picture, and I could even see the way she gulped.

Then she broke out into a happy smile and, for about half a second, before the second explosion, I could see Perry on the

screen. After that second explosion — even though it wasn't near as big as the first — that TV set was nothing but a mess of twisted junk, and there was no screen left to see anything on.

Perry liked to have everything just so, and he'd never think of going anyplace without his tie being knotted just right, and his socks matching, and so on. And here he'd traveled a thousand years into the future in bare feet. I felt kind of embarrassed for him.

Anyway, they were engaged, and now they must be married, so I guess she had slippers waiting for him. I'm just sorry I missed the wedding.

—WILLIAM MORRISON

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## FORECAST

Next month's installment of *PREFERRED RISK* by Edson McCann, the Galaxy-Simon & Schuster prize novel, adds to its portfolio of tension and devious threat as it reveals the premium put on an insured world. For there is a price for protection against all the sins and ills of mankind . . . but how big is it, who pays, who is the beneficiary . . . and is it worth the cost? No, the answers are not as simple and clear-cut as the actuarial tables they are based on!

Even if there is room for only one novelet, it's a truly big and important one. *THE MAPMAKERS* by Frederik Pohl charts the course of an expedition as historical and fearsome as Columbus's . . . more so, in fact, because his great danger was falling off the edge of Earth, which is naturally impossible . . . while this one's is toppling right out of the Universe, which isn't impossible at all! Then why must the harrowing trip be made? Well, you've undoubtedly wondered who calibrated the jumps through hyper-space that bridge the light-years between solar systems. Here they are, the whole heroic crew of people capable of fear and bewilderment in an unknown dimension, doing a job because it has to be done! You won't forget them or the tormented man who discovers how necessary a handicap can be!



# Grandy Devil

By FREDERIK POHL

*Speak of the devil and Grandy appeared — but not when he was desperately, urgently needed!*

Illustrated by ASHMAN

**M**AHLON begat Timothy, and Timothy begat Nathan, and Nathan begat Roger, and the days of their years were long on the Earth. But then Roger begat Orville, and Orville was a heller. He begat Augustus, Wayne, Walter, Benjamin and Carl, who was my father, and I guess that was going too far, because that was when Gideon Upshur stepped in to take a hand.

I was kissing Lucille in the parlor when the doorbell rang and she didn't take kindly to the interruption. He was a big old man

with a burned-brown face. He stamped the snow off his feet and stared at me out of crackling blue eyes and demanded, "Orvie?"

I said, "My name is George."

"Wipe the lipstick off your face, George," he said, and walked right in.

Lucille sat up in a hurry and began tucking the ends of her hair in place. He looked at her once and calmly took off his coat and hung it over the back of a chair by the fire and sat down.

"My name is Upshur," he said.

"Gideon Upshur. Where's Orville Dexter?"

I HAD been thinking about throwing him out up until then, but that made me stop thinking about it. It was the first time anybody had come around looking for Orville Dexter in almost a year and we had just begun breathing easily again.

I said, "That's my grandfather, Mr. Upshur. What's he done now?"

He looked at me. "You're his *grandson*? And you ask me what he's *done*?" He shook his head. "Where is he?"

I told him the truth: "We haven't seen Grandy Orville in five years."

"And you don't know where he is?"

"No, I don't, Mr. Upshur. He never tells anybody where he's going. Sometimes he doesn't even tell us after he comes back."

The old man pursed his lips. He leaned forward, across Lucille, and poured himself a drink from the Scotch on the side table.

"I swear," he said, in a high, shrill, old voice, "these Dexters are a caution. Go home."

He was talking to Lucille. She looked at him sulkily and opened her mouth, but I cut in.

"This is my fiancée," I said.

"Hah," he said. "No doubt. Well, there's nothing to do but

have it out with Orvie. Is the bed made up in the guest room?"

I protested, "Mr. Upshur, it isn't that we aren't glad to see any friend of Grandy's, but Lord knows when he'll be home. It might be tomorrow, it might be six months from now or years —"

"I'll wait," he said over his shoulder, climbing the stairs.

HAVING him there wasn't so bad after the first couple of weeks. I phoned Uncle Wayne about it, and he sounded quite excited.

"Tall, heavy-set old man?" he asked. "Very dark complexion?"

"That's the one," I said. "He seemed to know his way around the house pretty well, too."

"Well, why wouldn't he?" Uncle Wayne didn't say anything for a second. "Tell you what, George. You get your brothers together and —"

"I can't, Uncle Wayne," I said. "Harold's in the Army. I don't know where William's got to."

He didn't say anything for another second. "Well, don't worry. I'll give you a call as soon as I get back."

"Are you going somewhere, Uncle Wayne?" I wanted to know.

"I certainly am, George," he said, and hung up.

So there I was, alone in the house with Mr. Upshur. That's



the trouble with being the youngest.

Lucille wouldn't come to the house any more, either. I went out to her place a couple of times, but it was too cold to drive the Jaguar and William had taken the big sedan with him when he left, and Lucille refused to go anywhere with me in the jeep. So all we could do was sit in her parlor, and her mother sat right there with us, knitting and making little remarks about Grandy Orvie and that girl in Eatontown. So, all in all, I was pretty glad when the kitchen door opened and Grandy Orvie walked in.

"Grandy!" I cried. "I'm glad to see you! There's a man —"

"Hush, George," he said. "Where is he?"

"Upstairs. He usually takes a nap after I bring him his dinner on a tray."

"You take his dinner up? What's the matter with the servants?"

I coughed. "Well, Grandy, after that trouble in Eatontown, they —"

"Never mind," he said hastily. "Go ahead with what you're doing."

I finished scraping the dishes into the garbage-disposer and stacked them in the washer, while he sat there in his overcoat watching me.

"George," he said at last, "I'm

an old man. A very old man."

"Yes, Grandy," I answered.

"My grandfather's older than I am. And *his* grandfather is older than that."

"Well, sure," I said reasonably. "I never met them, did I, Grandy?"

"No, George. At least, I don't believe they've been home much these last few years. Grandy Timothy was here in '86, but I don't believe you were born yet. Come to think of it, even your dad wasn't born by then."

"Dad's sixty," I told him. "I'm twenty-one."

"Certainly you are, George. And your dad thinks a lot of you. He mentioned you just a couple of months ago. He said that you were getting to an age where you ought to be told about us Dexters."

"Told what, Grandy Orville?" I asked.

"Confound it, George, that's what I'm coming to! Can't you see that I'm trying to tell you something? It's hard to put into words, that's all."

"Can I help?" said Gideon Upshur from the door.

**G**RANDY Orville stood up straight and frosty. "I'll thank you, Gideon Upshur, to stay the be-dickens out of a family discussion!"

"It's my family, too, young man," said Gideon Upshur. "And that's why I'm here. I warned Cousin Mahlon, but he wouldn't listen. I warned Timothy, but he ran off to America — and look what *he* started!"

"A man's got a right to pass on his name," Grandy Orville said pridefully.

"Once, yes! I never said a man couldn't have a son — though you know I've never had one, Orvie. Where would the world be if all of us had children three and four at a time, the way you Dexters have been doing? Four now — sixteen when the kids grow up — sixty-four when *their* kids grow up. Why, in four or five hundred years, there'd be trillions of us, Orvie. The whole world would be covered six layers deep with immortals, squirming and fidgeting and —"

"Hush, man!" howled Grandy Orville. "Not in the front of the boy!"

Gideon Upshur stood up and yelled right back at him. "It's time he found out! I'm warning you, Orville Dexter, either you mend your ways or I'll mend them for you. I didn't come here to talk — I'm prepared to take sterner measures if I have to!"

"Why, you reeking pustoon," Grandy Orville started — but then he caught sight of me. "Out

of here, George! Go up to your room till I call you. And as for you, you old idiot, I'm as prepared as you are, if it comes to that —"

I went. It looked like trouble and I hated to leave Grandy Orville alone, but orders were orders; Dad had taught me that. The noises from the kitchen were terrible for a while, but by and by they died down.

It was quiet for a long, long time. After a couple of hours, I began to get worried and I went back downstairs quietly and pushed the kitchen door open a crack.

Grandy Orville was sitting at the kitchen table, staring into space. I didn't see Mr. Upshur at all.

Grandy Orville looked up and said in a tired voice, "Come in, George. I was just catching my breath."

"Where did Mr. Upshur go?" I asked.

"It was self-defense," he said quickly. "He'd outlived his usefulness, anyway."

**I** STARED at him. "Did something happen to Mr. Upshur?" I asked.

He sighed. "George, sometimes I think the old blood is running thin. Now don't bother me with any more questions right now, till I rest up a bit."

Orders were orders, as I say. I noticed that the garbage-disposal unit was whirring and I walked over to shut it off.

"Funny," I said. "I forgot I left it running."

Grandy Orville said nervously, "Don't give it a thought. Say, George, they haven't installed sewer lines while I was away, have they?"

"No, they haven't, Grandy," I told him. "Same old dry well and septic tank."

"That's too bad," he grumbled. "Well, I don't suppose it matters."

I wasn't listening too closely; I had noticed that the floor was slick and shiny.

"Grandy," I said, "you didn't have to mop the floor for me. I can manage, even if all the servants did quit when —"

"Oh, shut up about the servants," he snapped testily. "George, I've been thinking. There's a lot that needs to be explained to you, but this isn't the best time for it and maybe your dad ought to do the explaining. He knows you better than I do. Frankly, George, I just don't know how to put things so you'll understand. Didn't you ever notice that there was anything different about us Dexters?"

"Well, we're pretty rich."

"I don't mean that. For instance, that time you were run over by the truck when you were

a kid. Didn't that make you suspect anything — how soon you mended, I mean?"

"Why, I don't think so, Grandy," I said, thinking back. "Dad told me that all the Dexters always healed fast." I bent down and looked under the table. Grandy Orville was sitting at. "Why, that looks like old clothes down there. Isn't that the same kind of suit Mr. Upshur was wearing?"

Grandy Orville shrugged tiredly. "He left it for you," he explained. "Now don't ask me any more question, because I've got to go away for a while and I'm late now. If your Uncle Wayne comes back, tell him thanks for letting me know Mr. Upshur was here. I'll give your regards to your dad if we happen to meet."

WELL, that was last winter. I wish Grandy would come back so I could stop worrying about the problem he left me.

Lucille never did get over her peeve, so I married Alice along about the middle of February. I'd have liked having some of the family there at the wedding, but none of them was in town just then — or since, for that matter — and it wasn't really necessary because I was of legal age.

I was happy with Alice right from the start, but even more important, it explained what

Grandy and Mr. Upshur had been trying to tell me. About what us Dexters are, that is.

Alice is a very attractive girl and a good housekeeper, which is a good thing — we haven't been able to get any of the servants back. But that's good, too, in a way, because it keeps her inside the house a lot.

It's getting on toward nice weather, though, and I'm having

a tough time keeping her away from the third terrace, where the dry well and septic tank are. And if she goes down there, she's bound to hear the noises.

I don't know. Maybe the best thing I could do would be to roll the stone off the top of the septic tank and let what's struggling around in there come out.

But I'm afraid he's pretty mad.

—FREDERIK POHL

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## **GALAXY'S 5 Star Shelf**

*EARTHLIGHT* by Arthur C. Clarke. Ballantine Books, \$2.00 Cloth, 35c Paper

**I** KNOW of no one who can make the as-yet-unknown so vividly and immediately real as Arthur C. Clarke. *Earthlight*, which deals with life on the Moon at a time when it is serving as a way station to Terran outposts on most of the planets and large satellites of our system, has the palpable, almost visual effect of an eyewitness report.

The plot is a fairly standard type of melodrama, but it is de-

veloped with all the author's abundant ability to make even melodrama plausible. For my money, this is the best tale about what it would be like on the Moon that has yet been written.

*BEYOND THE BARRIERS OF SPACE AND TIME*, edited by Judith Merril. Random House, \$2.95

**T**HE new Merril contains 19 stories, 16 of which rate B-plus or better — a remarkably high average. The book deals with parapsychological powers



and includes tales ranging from a sensitive item by Rhoda Broughton, first published in England in 1873, to a couple of late-1954 entries.

There are several real discoveries from the backfiles of the s-f magazines and a beauty from the *Satevepost*; an Agatha Christie (which I didn't like) and a John Collier (which I adored).

**EXPLAINING THE ATOM** by Selig Hecht. Revised and with Four Additional Chapters by Eugene Rabinowitch. Viking Press, \$3.75

**IT'S** a pleasure to have a chance to bring this book, which originally appeared in 1947, to your attention. It is still far and away the best lay book on atomic energy ever written.

Dr. Rabinowitch's revisions and additions to the late Dr. Hecht's text are excellent, too, and the book makes the history and science of nuclear physics — including the hydrogen bomb — clear, understandable and genuinely exciting.

It does assume a fairly mature reader, since it is not "written down" or patronizing or oversimplified, but anyone who can read *GALAXY* can read and profit by it.

**MESSIAH** by Gore Vidal. Ballantine Books, 35c

**MY** REACTION to this astonishing novel can best be summarized by describing it as "Henry James cross-pollinated with M. P. Shiel." For it is written (at first, at least) with an almost Jamesian luxuriance of style, while the plot is almost Shielian in fantastic vividness. The story is that of an anti-religious religious leader who preaches that Death is more desirable than anything. It tells how his simple but poisonous ideas are subverted by a Hollywood-type publicity man and how the narrator, who begins by being persuaded of the Messiah's creed, ends by being his (or, rather, the publicity man's) antagonist.

It's a strange and uncomfortable anti-utopia, done with much more than routine literary skill.

**ALL ABOUT THE FUTURE**, edited by Martin Greenberg. Gnome Press, \$3.50

**THIS** collection of utopias and anti-utopias is about the best of Martin Greenberg's anthologies. It contains six superb novels and novellas, all A or A-plus, together with "introductions" by Heinlein and Asimov, and the

full text of Edward Wellen's bits from his non-fact "Encyclopedia of Galactic Culture."

They, the Heinlein and novels by Pohl, Sturgeon and Damon Knight come from *GALAXY*; stories by Poul Anderson, Walter M. Miller, Jr., and the late Malcolm Jameson are from *Astounding*. None has ever been anthologized before, either.

I think the book is an essential addition to anyone's basic library of science fiction.

*THE CHEMICALS OF LIFE* by Isaac Asimov. Abelard-Schuman, \$2.50

ONE of the best science popularizations I have ever read is here presented, unfortunately, as a juvenile. It isn't. Asimov (yes, *our* Asimov) has simply taken the basic knowledge about enzymes, vitamins and hormones and translated it into the language of the layman.

I have always found biochemistry a formidable subject, but this little volume offers a delightful and understandable introduction to it. And the drawings by John Bradford are excellent, too.

*THE REBELLIOUS STARS* by Isaac Asimov; *AN EARTH GONE MAD* by Roger Dee. Ace Books, 35c

THIS Ace double contains the ever-superb *The Stars, Like Dust*, here quite unnecessarily retitled as above — *GALAXY* readers remember it as *Tyrann* — and Dee's ominous-pitched piece of turgidity about a world of tomorrow in which some sort of alien "things" are gradually taking over the human race, individual by individual, and turning them into willing slaves.

*THE CHAOS FIGHTERS* by Robert Moore Williams. Ace Books, 25c

THE prolific short-story writer Robert Moore Williams' first novel deals with parapsychology and with the notion of genetic leaps: the idea that Man progresses not by gradual, almost invisible evolution, but by sudden mutations.

In this fast-moving job, the mutation is both physical and moral; and, despite its overmelodramatic plot and undistinguished style, it makes its point quite positively. It's no masterpiece, but I think you will enjoy it, if you like still more about the unlimited power of Mind over Matter. Personally, I could do with less of Psi; it's being rammed both into the ground and down readers' throats.

**DESIGN OF THE UNIVERSE**  
by Fritz Kahn. Crown Publishers,  
\$5.00

**F**OR someone who wants a bird's-eye view of science, from physics to geology, from chemistry to astronomy, this book will have a useful function. It's big, profusely (though not always well) illustrated, and very comprehensive indeed. The style is lively and the inaccuracies, which are not few, are minor. It's almost a home correspondence course in science, without any of the pedantry that too often mars such courses.

As books go today, it's a remarkable bargain at its price. Definitely worth your consideration.

**FALSE NIGHT** by Algis Budrys.  
Lion Books, 35c

**B**UILT around Budrys' GALAXY story "Ironclad," this book achieved for me a maximum of confusion with a minimum of direction — and yet I found it moderately good reading.

It's another tale of the attempt of remnants of the human race to recivilize itself after an unnamed world catastrophe, and it's almost as bloody and chaotic

as the situation would be if it actually occurred.

**EXPLORING MARS** by Robert S. Richardson. McGraw-Hill Book Co., \$4.00

**T**HE only thing wrong with this study is its title, for less than 100 of its 252 pages are devoted to the Red Planet.

Actually, the book is a fine review of current knowledge on the prospects of space travel, the nature of lunar existence, the probabilities of Martian ecology, and what conditions would be like on the other planets of the Solar System.

A good job, though perhaps a bit simple for those who have already boned up on the subject in more advanced books. Fine, though, for the novice.

**B**RIEF NOTES. Tenn's *Of All Possible Worlds*, originally reviewed in these columns in April, 1954, is at last published by Ballantine (35c). Watch for it . . . Donald Day informs me that the price of his invaluable *Index to the Science Fiction Magazines* is still \$6.50, not \$5.00 as I erroneously reported in February.

—GROFF CONKLIN

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

(Continued from page 4)

"Now the U.S.D.A. entomologists are figuring out how many sterilized males will be needed to hunt down all the females in the state of Florida. They are even hoping to use the same method to exterminate other insect pests whose females are equally monogamous."

Bully for our side, of course — with such animal suffering and economic waste involved, I take my stand boldly against the screw worm.

But it brings up, as I mentioned, the question of invasion techniques that writers are so fond of. Alien conquest of Earth is the usual goal of these stories, though sometimes it's the East-West conflict. Many of the methods suggested are clever; none, however, has been as devilish as the one quoted.

Before anybody leaps hopefully to the typewriter, let me point out that it's only some insects that go on reproducing after a single impregnation. A good thing, too, or we'd be up to here in flora, fauna and each other. And a world like that should be given gladly to any beings willing to take it.

Our lures and traps are all appeals to basic instincts. The moose and duck calls, and the supersonic gadget that broadcasts the mosquito siren song and

brings males crashing into an electrified barrier, play on sex drive. Food is more commonly used, of course, but there are others, too.

Assuming one wants to wipe out mankind, what's the best bait? Food, sex and such are fine for destroying individuals, but I doubt if they can be made to do in the whole species.

Well, war is the closest thing to alien invasion. Why do people fight? The *realpolitik* reason is generally real estate, but that's for the statesmen; the population needs slogans to die for. They won't accept cynical goals.

So with those who know suckers best — on a cosmic scale — idealism is a thousand-to-one favorite over lust and greed.

If universal suicide could be induced, there would be less of a mess. Here are the necessary conditions:

The suicide rate is four times as high after 60 as before 20; higher among divorced than married persons; among professionals than non-professionals; white-collar workers than laborers; officers than enlisted men; urbanites than ruralites.

But it's too complicated. I'll put my money on idealism. I wish it weren't so exploitable, yet that's the essence of a lure — and idealism is Man's bait.

—H. L. GOLD



# Inside Story

By RICHARD WILSON

*Even Mars had its silly season, when news  
is so slack that it has to be invented . . .  
only this item was the horrifying McCoy!*

Illustrated by MEL HUNTER

THE teletype on the wave to Earth clacked briefly to life and Scott Warren looked inquiringly at the operator. The operator handed him the message from Galactic News Service headquarters in New York. It said: DULLEST HERE. ANYTHING RPT ANYTHING AVBL YR END QUERY.

Scott, bureau chief at Iopa, Martian headquarters for Galactic News, shrugged and said, "Tell them 'Nothing repeat nothing available here. Deadeast ever.'"

Kathy Brand, a red-headed reporter, looked up from her desk where she was pecking fitfully at

a typewriter. She held out a slip.

"I've got a real hot item here on the longevity of the Martian sand lizard, if that's any help, Scott," she said. "Honestly, I've never seen it so slow."

THE door from the corridor opened and George Mercer came in, carrying himself carefully as if he were maintaining his balance only by the utmost concentration.

"Hi, people," George said. "Notice anything different about me?"

George covered the Martian parliament for Galactic News,

but parliament was out of session now and he'd been switched temporarily to a roving assignment.

"You sound tinny," Scott said, "as if you had something in your throat. Been treating it down at New York Dan's?" New York Dan's was the bar and steakhouse nearby.

"Sober as a senator," George Mercer asserted. "Guess again."

"You look sort of—flattened out," Kathy Brand said. "Your tunic isn't hanging right, for instance, and your breeches are all bunched up."

"Observant girl. She'll go far, Scott. It happens you're both right, in a way. I'm wearing the latest in outdoor fashion—an invisible suit. Over my regular outfit. Ask me why."

"Why?" Kathy asked dutifully.

"Trying it out for a friend. It's heatproof and airtight."

"Skintight, too," Scott said.

"True," George said. "It clings. That's one of its advantages. No more cumbersome spacesuits. No clanking around like a trained monster when you have to explore an airless world. Go as you are in cool comfort, retain your dexterity. Communicate by short wave. That's why I sound tinny."

"How come it's invisible?" Scott asked.

"Just happened. A batch of

gunk boiled over and my friend discovered that made it non-refractive. So of course you can't see it. Just an extra added attraction. The suit would work just as well in sky-blue or yellow-stripe, if that happened to be the fashion."

"What does your friend plan to do with it?"

George shrugged. "He's a research chap. Figures things out, or stumbles on them. Leaves it to others to find a use for them."

"Hmm," Scott said. "If we could make you invisible, as well as the suit, we might scare up a story. New York's been utmosting us for copy and all we've got is the latest Museum pronouncement on the sand lizard."

"Mid-season doldrums, eh?" George absent-mindedly reached toward his pocket, but was stopped by the all-enveloping suit. He grinned. "I was going for a cigarette, but I couldn't get anything in my mouth anyway. Does my face look scrunched around any? It feels all lopsided under this stuff."

"It flattens out your nose a little," Kathy said. "If I remember your old nose correctly. But nothing serious. How do you breathe?"

"Oxygen pack in my belt. Self-charging and it lasts indefinitely. I'd just as soon have a little real air now, though." He began to

peel off the suit, starting with some sort of fastening under the chin.

They watched him, fascinated. He looked as if he were pulling invisible spider webs from various parts of his body. Finally he sat down and, lifting one leg at a time, pulled handfuls of nothing off the ends of his feet.

"Better remember where you put it down," Scott said, "or you'll never find it again."

**A** COMMUNICATOR lighted up and Scott answered it: "Galactic News, Warren."

It was a GN stringer at Druro, site of a notorious concentration camp of the former Martian regime.

The camp was now a nully colony. The nullies were outcasts—diseased, feeble-minded, animal-people—mostly Martians and a few Earth people, too, transported from the slums of Iopa, Senalla and other big Martian cities to the remote wilderness around Druro.

There was no known cure for a nully. His disease, highly contagious, was so loathsome that the Martian government deemed the nully colony the best solution short of extermination. Scott sometimes wondered if Druro's nully colony was any better than the old concentration camp of the deposed Rockhead regime.

The Druro stringer was calling Scott about the latest of a series of rumors about the colony. The reports could not be verified because none but a nully ever entered the colony, set back in the hills.

The nullies lived a wild life in the huts and barracks scattered around, or in caves, as they chose. Once inside the colony they never came out. Supplies were air-dropped to them and pilots often reported scenes of savagery as the ragged nullies fought over the food packages.

The rumors were about the nullies organizing. That they had leaders who enforced discipline. The old anarchistic ways were being curbed and some mysterious project was in the works back in the hills, hidden from the eyes of spotter pilots.

The stringer had a new one this time. He'd seen mysterious lights floating above the colony, at levels ranging from six feet to two thousand feet. The funny thing, the stringer said, was that the nullies didn't seem to be alarmed by the lights. They either took no notice of them or, in one or two instances, seemed to be friendly with them—almost as if they were in communication.

Scott Warren took notes as the stringer talked, then thanked him and asked him to keep in touch with the situation.



SCOTT knocked out a story of a few hundred words and sailed it to the operator for transmission to news-hungry Earth.

But then he thought better of it and took it back.

"I'm getting sophomoric in my tedium," he said. "This could start off the silly season with a bang. I wish I knew what was really going on in that nully colony, though." He put the story on the spike.

George Mercer lifted it off and read it. Then he said to Scott, casually, "Like me to find out for you?"

"Huh?"

"I'm on roving assignment," George said. "I could easily rove over Druro way."

"I admit you're a better reporter than our stringer there," Scott said. "I suppose you could scratch together a decent think-piece or a situationer, but I frankly don't believe it would justify the expense."

"You're talking about a knot-hole view, from outside the fence," George said.

"Of course."

"Well, I'm not," said George. "I'm talking about an inside story."

"*Inside* the nully colony?" said Scott. "You're crazy!"

"I would have been yesterday. But today I've got a new suit." He looked around for it. "Where-

ever I put it. Wearing that, I could get inside without risking infection and without anybody suspecting I was anything but another poor old nully."

"I repeat," said Scott, "you're crazy. They never let anybody out of the colony once he's in. You know that."

George gestured airily. "A mere administrative detail. That's your department, as I see it. You'd have to persuade the Health Commission that the suit does make me contagion-proof and then arrange to get me out when I have the story. I'll keep you posted on interim details by short wave."

KATHY Brand wandered over. "You'd better give up, George," she said. "Scott's pretty pigheaded about this hero business. I learned that when I sneaked off to the outlaw camp and pretended I was a convert—just to make a story. Scott's still sore because he had to play hero himself to come rescue me. Made him very uncomfortable."

"An altogether different situation," said George stiffly. "Go 'way, little girl, and don't bother us big men."

Kathy shook her head insistently so that her long red hair whipped across her face. "It's exactly the same thing. I quote you the words of the master, which

are engraved in my memory in letters of fire: 'We're reporters, not secret agents. Our job is to report the news, not make it.' By Scott Warren, Bureau Chief. Ask him."

Scott smiled. "She may have a point there, George. There's no double standard any more, you know. What's sauce for the goose . . . if you'll excuse the expression, Kathy."

She made a face at him, but George Mercer scowled.

"Look, Scott," he said. "If you're going to say no, okay, it's no. But you haven't said it yet and I don't think you will. This is no hero pitch. This is an assignment, geared to the circumstances. I have no intention of doing more than finding out what goes on in the nully colony and doing a straightforward reporting job. If I stumble across anything too big for me, I'll holler for help. But if there's anything to be found I'll find it. There's a story there, in any case. Now give me your answer—yes or no—like a newsman, not like a big sister."

"Well . . ." said Scott.

George grinned triumphantly at Kathy. "Okay," he said, "it's settled. You start cutting the red tape, Chiefie, and I'll get in some research on the nullies so I can act like one. Now where *did* I put that suit?"

**G**EORGE Mercer had been gone three days. He hadn't reported in all that time, and Scott Warren sat by a communicator, nibbling on a fingernail, waiting.

There was nothing else to do. The doldrums were still on. The operator sat at his silent machine, a pastime button plugged in one ear, grinning idiotically at some program no one else was able to hear. Kathy Brand sat at her desk, putting on lipstick.

Scott made a check mark on a pad. "This is the sixteenth time, by actual count, that you've made yourself a new mouth," he said.

"I can't help it," she said. "I keep biting it off. *Why* doesn't he call in?"

Scott shrugged. "I have no objections to makeup," he said. "On the contrary. But I do object to women giving themselves more lip than they really have. It's insincere."

"I experiment," Kathy said. "I've got a right. I don't tell you how to shave."

"True," said Scott, starting on another fingernail.

The communicator buzzed and lit up. He snapped it on.

"Galactic News, Warren."

"Hello, Scott," a tinny voice said. "This is George, I guess."

"Go ahead, George," Scott yelled. "What do you mean 'I



guess? Are you all right? Come on—talk!”

“It’s pretty rugged in here. I’ve been on the labor detail ever since I got in. The new arrivals get the worst of it. This is the first chance I’ve had to get away by myself.”

“Have you seen any of those lights?”

“Only from a distance. I don’t know what they are. But every time they come there’s some sort of conclave back in the hills. I haven’t been able to get in on the party. Only the Regulars are allowed back there.”

“The Regulars?”

“The leaders. The strongest ones among those with the most seniority. They’re a pretty clan-nish crew.”

“Have you got anything that’d make a story? Forgive me for being commercial.”

“Not yet. I just wanted to report in. Wait a minute—somebody’s coming. I’ll leave the beam

on so you’ll hear, in case I can’t talk to you again. I’d leave it on all the time, but I’ve got to conserve the power.”

There was an interim of silence, punctuated only by George’s breathing. Then Scott heard a faint voice.

“What you do out here?”

“Just takin’ a walk, boss,” George’s voice said meekly.

“You get back!”

There was an “Uh!” from George, as if he’d been struck, or kicked. “Okay, boss. I’m going.”

“You go fast. Got work to do.”

Evidently George decided there was no point in communicating any more of this. The wave went dead.

A BUZZ woke Scott Warren. He snapped on his bedside communicator reflexively. He checked the time—about an hour before dawn.

There was a wild laugh from

the speaker. Then a low voice said, "Don't talk to me! Just listen!"

It had a tinny sound and Scott recognized it immediately. He kept silent.

"Great Scott! The lights!" the voice said. "By George!"

George Mercer, somewhere in the nully colony, and obviously where he could be overheard, was improvising a code to identify himself.

There was an insane cackle, not from George but close by him.

"Pretty lights!" another voice said. "I catch!"

"Balloons," George said. "Like



fire balloons, as big as your head. You like balloons, Mogi?"

"Very fine," the voice replied—a Martian voice. "I catch."

"Look out!" George's voice. "Duck! It's trying to catch you!" There was the wild laugh again. "It did catch you! Went right into your head and disappeared. Great Scott! Can you imagine that?"

*I hear you, George, Scott said to himself. Good work, boy. I hope you're all right.*

"Mogi," George said. "Speak to me, Mogi, you old balloon-head. Mogi! Where are you going? Come back!"

There was perhaps a minute of silence, then George's voice came again, normal now and pitched softly. "Scott. You there?"

"Yes," he whispered.

"Good. This will have to be quick. There were two balloons and two of us. Mogi and I were committed in the same batch. He used to be a pit-filler at the spaceport; lived in that slum behind Market East. He's a pretty sick boy. I copied his cough and his cackles. But these balloons. They're about six inches in diameter, yellow-white, glow in the dark, and they appear to have intelligence. You hear me all right?"

"Fine," Scott said. "I'm making notes."

"Naturally," George chuckled.

"Put us both down for overtime. Anyhow, Mogi and I slipped away to pick edibark—anything to supplement our austerity diet. We were in the woods when the two fire balloons came over. They swooped at us. One went right for Mogi, seemed to merge with his head, then disappeared completely. The other one made a pass at me, but then veered off and zoomed away. Mogi went dashing off in the brush.

"That's the picture, Scott. No time to theorize now. I've got to get back before they find I'm missing, or there'll be new welts on my tender hide. The suit's no protection against that sort of thing. Tell Kathy she was right about this secret agent stuff. I shoulda stood in the newsroom."

The tinny voice stopped.

SCOTT sat for a moment, listening to the faint whoops and squeals of a disconnected wave, then flicked off the communicator. He swung his feet out of bed, lit a cigarette and read over his notes.

The glowing balloons, with their seeming intelligence, had avoided George. Did his skintight invisible suit protect him from the balloons, as well as from infection from the diseased nullies? And, having preferred the Martian, were the balloons now suspicious?

Scott went back a step. If the fire balloons were intelligent, or directed by intelligence, what were they? Some new outlaw device?

Not likely. The outlaws, badly defeated in their last guerrilla foray against World Government troops, had retreated into the desert wastes. That was their land—the flat desert beyond Revo to the north—not the scrubby hills and dwarf forest of the Druro nully colony.

Were the balloons perhaps a tool of the “Regulars,” the self-appointed leaders of the colony? It was possible they were just awe-inspiring gadgets to keep the lesser nullies in line. But then they wouldn’t have awed George unless they were something more sinister.

Maybe this was the time to call in the authorities. George was just one man and his only resources were his untested suit, his reporter’s ingenuity and his tenuous link of communication to Galactic News—which, after all, was only a civilian agency with highly unofficial standing at W.G. headquarters. As Kathy Brand had reminded him, it was really a job for the World Government Investigators, the professional secret agents.

But George, in spite of his half-serious grumble as he signed off, would be indignant if he were

pulled off the assignment now, just when he’d made his first revealing contact.

Scott snuffed out his cigarette and lay back.

“Okay, George,” he said half-aloud, “it’s your story. But don’t kill yourself getting it.”

KATHY Brand filled a cup with cold water from a carafe. She set the cup on Scott’s desk and plunked a tablet into it. The liquid churned up, turned dark and began to steam.

“Black,” she said, “as directed. That’s your fourth cup of coffee this morning, Scott. You must have been out all night.”

“Up,” he said, “but not out. George called me at home.”

“Oh? Any news?”

“Nothing waveworthy,” he said, “unless we go off half-cocked and tip our hand. No use letting the opposition in on what we’re doing until we can sew up the yarn.”

He was telling her what George had learned so far when the Earthwave began to clack away. The operator handed him the message. WELCOME MATCHER I.N. SAYING EXSENALLA LIFE REPORTED DEIMOS.

I.N. was Interplanetary News, Galactic’s major rival. Senalla was Mars’ second biggest city.

“That old chestnut,” Scott snorted. “They drag that one out

every year or so, whenever it's dull. If it isn't Deimos, it's Phobos."

Nevertheless he scanned the drop copy from the Mars circuit. Nothing there. He prepared a message for the GN bureau at Senalla. N.Y. HAS I.N. REVIVING PERENNIAL ABOUT LIFE DEIMOS-WISE. WANT OWN STORY ONLY IF ABLE NAIL DOWN HARD QUOTES EX-HEAVIEST AUTHORITIES OTHERWISE NEED GOOD THROWDOWN. PLS ACK.

The acknowledgment came immediately with this added note. ALREADY CHASING. APPEARS I.N. MAY HAVE SOMETHING THIS TIME. INFORMATIVELY THEY QUOTE SCAVENGER SKIPPER REPORTING MOLESTATION BY FIERY GLOBES WHILE UPPICKING SCRAP.

"Fiery globes!" Kathy said. "Isn't that what George saw?"

"Yes," he said. "Kathy, call the Observatory. Get Dr. Erris; he knows us. See if he has any independent knowledge. If not, try to get a quote from him on the possibility of life on Deimos, or comment on the scavenger skipper's story."

"Right."

SCOTT itched to call George Mercer, but he knew it would be unwise. George couldn't talk if he were under the eyes of the nully leaders—the Regulars. His existence was tough enough without complicating it further. Scott

would just have to wait till George called him.

Kathy had got through to Dr. Erris and was making notes as she talked to him. Scott looked over her shoulder and read her neat abbreviated longhand.

"Dr unheard skipper story unhas own knowldg life Marsmoons but wld spose if existed b totly alien life as known Mars-Earth owing uttr lack air infintsmll grvty outpointg too sevl explore-trips unfnd lifesigns . . ."

Scott turned away to the Senalla printer, which had come to life. Kathy's story was too unsensational to be anything but a "with" piece.

But GN's Senalla bureau had something. SENALLA, MARS — (GN)—"Reports from a scavenger ship that life in the form of fiery globes might exist on Deimos, Mars' farther satellite, received a cautious reception in official quarters here.

"Spokesmen who were quick to discount similar reports in past years have guarded answers today when asked to confirm or deny the story.

"It was learned that the Commission of Exploration and Assessment had dispatched a scout ship to Deimos to check up on the reports, which came originally from the master of the scavenger vessel." (MEMO DESK: I.N. UPSEWED SKIPPER PLUGGED ALL

LEAKS BEFORE TURNING HIM OVER TO C.E.A. BUT WE SEEKING INTERVIEW FIRST MATE.) . . .

Scott read copy on the story, tore off and spiked the memo, and gave the story to the operator to put on the wave to Earth before New York could complain again about I.N.'s big beat.

Kathy, finished talking to Dr. Erris, typed out her piece. It wasn't much, but it would keep the story ticking for a while. Scott penciled through the copy, wrote "With Senalla Globes" at the top of it and passed it on to the operator.

Obviously there was a connection between what the scavenger skipper had seen on Deimos and the fire balloons George Mercer had been in the nully camp. If only George would call in, GN might be able to recoup on the story.

Interplanetary News was now miles ahead, having gone full tilt with first and second leads, adds, bulletin intros, urgents, precedes, follows and all the other sluglines of a fast-breaking story. Galactic limped along behind. The combined efforts of the Iopa and Senalla bureaus could produce no more for the Earth wave than two "it was learned" stories, Kathy's "with" bit and half a dozen "speculation here" think pieces and sidebars.

Far from appeasing Galactic's

head office, these seemed only to infuriate it. By the time Scott Warren had an ill-digested lunch and his fifteenth cup of coffee at his desk, the messages from New York had reached a peak of implied invective in the tightly written waves of interplanetary communications.

KATHY Brand plopped another coffee tablet into a cup and set it in front of Scott.

"What we need," she said, "is an interview with one of those fire globes. I don't think Senalla's ever going to find that first mate. I could take the correspondent car and make a fast jaunt to Deimos. 'I Talked to a Fiery Globe, an Exclusive Galactic News Interview by Kathy Brand.' How about it, Scott?"

"No!" he shouted, slamming his palm on the desk. "We can't spare any more heroes."

Kathy looked hurt at his show of temper. "I was only kidding, Chief," she said. "Don't take it so hard. Suppose I.N. did beat us on this one. It's just a fluke. We scoop them every other day in the year."

Scott took a sip of the hot coffee, then put the cup down with a clatter. "I'm not worrying about scoops and beats. I'm wondering what the hell happened to George."

As if on cue, the communicator



buzzed and lighted up brightly. "Galactic, Warren," Scott barked.

"This is your wandering boy," said George's voice, tinny but clear.

"George! Are you all right? Where are you?"

"I'm all right, considering. I'm in no man's land—halfway between the Regulars back in the hills and the new nullies, the ones that came in recently. I'm an outcast."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean neither group will have anything to do with me. The Regulars have barricaded themselves and won't let anybody else in. They've got crude weapons, but they're effective enough—they winged me once with a slingshot—and I beat it out of there. And the new nullies—those who've been here six months or less—have all been taken over by the balloons. The balloons are intelligent, Scott, no doubt about it, and when they take over a nully he becomes a real smart cookie."

"The balloons are from Deimos, from all indications," Scott told him. "They've been seen there, at least."

"Interesting," George said. "Have they showed up anywhere else?"

"No."

"Apparently they've all come

here. You can only see them at night and obviously they're the lights our Druro stringer saw here in the nully colony. You spiked that yarn, but I suppose it's common property now and Druro's crawling with the press."

"As a matter of fact, nobody's connected the two," Scott said. "Maybe we'd better have an eye-witnesser from you now, before they beat us with our own story."

"I'd rather you didn't, Scott. If you can hold off a while longer, I may be able to give you a better yarn."

"What's your theory? Are the Deimons taking over the nully colony? But why only there? And why are the Regulars keeping the others at bay? It sounds as if the Regulars are immune to them, somehow. And you, George. Why haven't the balloons taken you over?"

"I don't know. I'm working on it. I don't think it's the suit, but something stops them."

"What are they up to, these balloons?"

"From what I've seen—they don't let me get too close—I'd say it was some kind of mobilization. The nullies hold secret enclaves. They size up the Regulars' fences. They drill, like militia, with sticks for guns. Individually they act pretty crazy, like typical nullies, but when you put the pieces together there seems

to be a plan behind it all. If you want a snap answer I'd say they were mobilizing for—take it or leave it—conquest.”

“Conquest? Of the Regulars?”

“Just at first,” George said. “Then of Druro. And then maybe the rest of Mars.”

**G**ALACTIC News caught up with the life-on-Deimos story by the second day, after the skipper of the salvage ship issued an official statement through the C.E.A., but Interplanetary News was basking in its initial beat and its stories were getting the play on Earth. Bits of Galactic's dispatches, the New York bureau told Scott angrily, were being shirt-tailed on to the I.N. stories, if used at all.

Scott fidgeted, bit a fingernail, drank black coffee and wished he hadn't promised George he'd hold off on the Druro angle. But of course he had to, if George's position was not to be jeopardized further. There was still a chance that GN could regain all it had lost, if things broke right. Scott was worried, though, that by then he'd be a nervous wreck. And George, if his suit failed him, could become a physical wreck—a nully—doomed to spend the rest of his life in the colony.

One small satisfaction was that there would be no more hard

news about the globes on Deimos, now that World Government had stepped in. W.G.'s Exploration and Assessment Commission was notoriously hush-hush when it was on the trail of something that might even remotely affect the public safety. If he knew E & A, and he did, there wouldn't even be a leak about its activities until it had everything analyzed, categorized, ecologized and then, perhaps, partly declassified.

So it all depended on George.

And George came through. A first-rate reporter with an instinctive sense of deadline and drama, he called in at the right moment.

“George Mercer here,” he said in a terse whisper. “Stand by.”

Scott turned up the volume for the voice-cast from George. He flipped on the switch to record it. He directed Kathy to make long-hand notes for ready reference and another staffer to make a complete shorthand transcription for fuller interim quotes if they were needed before the tape playback could be used. Scott stationed himself next to the operator on the Earthwave, ready to dictate bulletin matter direct.

**G**EORGE'S voice came again. “Here's the situation. The nullies—the newcomers like me—are preparing to attack the Regulars. I'm pretty sure that by



now all the nullies except me have been taken over by the fiery balloons. I assume the Regulars are not possessed, but I don't know why not.

"The Regulars will be attacked at the weakest spot in their perimeter—a segment of barricade built at the top of a sandy hill. If the nullies can loosen a couple of logs, they're in.

"The Regulars are armed to their back teeth, with slings, spears, clubs, pots of boiling water, primitive stuff like that, but plenty effective against unarmed men. That's what the nullies are, except for their crazy sticks. Whether they have some special kind of power because the balloons have taken them over, I don't know. I should think they'd have to."

"Where are you, George?"

"I'm up a tree," George said wryly. "Literally. I've climbed the tallest tree overlooking the battlefield and I'm pretty well hidden. I'll give it to you play-by-play as soon as the whistle blows. That ought to be any minute, if I've eavesdropped correctly."

"Good boy," said Scott. "Have you seen any of the fire balloons lately? As such, I mean?"

"Not since last night. A dozen of them, traveling in formation, went over the barricade. They all

came back, as if they tried to take over the key men among the Regulars and' failed. They hovered around the nullies for a while, then took off."

"In what direction?"

"Straight up," said George. "Deimos was zooming up from the horizon at the time, if you want to make anything of that."

"I'll make a note of it, for now," Scott said.

THE nullies came out of the dwarf forest, each carrying a piece of wood fashioned like a Q rifle. The nullies, looking purposeful and unafraid, walked up the sandy hill toward the barricade. They did not run. They held the mock rifles at present arms, not aiming them.

The regulars opened fire. Spears whistled, rocks were slung, wicked boomerangs hurtled. The attackers went down, singly at first, then in pairs, then by the dozen. They made no attempt to take cover or increase their pace. Those that remained upright continued to walk, inexorably, toward the barricade. The wounded hobbled or crawled toward it.

"I don't get it," George said at one point in his description. "It's suicide."

The massacre went on. Finally there was only one nully left. As if unaware that he was alone, he

walked on. He had been hit in the arm and dropped his stick, but he went on. A new barrage came from behind the barricade, concentrating on the lone attacker. He went down.

One last spear whistled through the air and there was a gasp of pain from George Mercer.

"It got me in the arm, Scott," he said in a low, taut voice. "Pinned me to the tree trunk."

Scott heard sounds that told him George must be trying to wrench the spear loose. Then he heard, "It's no use. I can't get it out. Tore the suit, dammit!"

That meant George no longer had protection from the disease that infected all the nullies, the loathsome disease without a cure that turned men into animals.

"They're coming out from behind the barricade," George's pain-wracked voice said. "The Regulars. They're finishing off that nully who was wounded at close range."

"George, never mind that now," Scott said urgently. "We've got to get you out of there. Give me your coordinates, as near as you can, and we'll have a World Government ship to you in ten minutes."

"Too late, Scott. They've spotted me. Here they come now."

There was no way out. If they didn't kill him, they would capture and infect him. Those were

the alternatives — death or a living death.

"They're under the tree now," George said. "I guess they're not going to kill me or they'd've done it already. One of them's climbing up. One of the leaders. An Earthman."

Scott heard George's heavy breathing, then the rustle of branches being climbed.

An unfamiliar voice was saying, "Okay, fella, let's get you loose. If you bystanders insist on getting in the way, you're bound to get hurt."

There was a sharp crack, apparently the spear being broken off close to George's arm. George gasped with pain.

"Now brace yourself," the voice said, "while I pull you off the rest of it."

There was a shuddering groan from George. Then silence.

"He fainted," someone said. "Lost a lot of blood. Here, I'll lower him to you. Easy! He's not a sack of meal, he's a man. And a brave man at that."

SCOTT Warren and the others at Galactic News listened in taut silence. Kathy Brand, who sometimes pretended to be a hardboiled newsgal, had tears in her eyes.

Scott, for the dozenth time since George left for Druro, looked frustrated. George's fate

was in the hands of the Regulars—the mysterious people of the nully colony who in some unknown way had risen above their destiny and become men again. At least the man who had taken George down from the tree was no nully. He was a man of leadership and intelligence. He even had a sense of humor.

Scott hadn't dictated anything. Sure, there had been a battle, and one side had won, but what did it all mean? Without perspective, the story would be a bare recital of meaningless events.

He could make nothing of the desultory talk, as the unconscious George was carried inside the barricade. There were sounds that told him they were preparing to treat George's arm, which had been tourniqueted earlier, then expressions of surprise when it was discovered that George was wearing a transparent protective suit.

He heard the leader say in further surprise, "What's this?"

Apparently George's communicator was found. Then there was no more talk and in a moment someone had clicked off the communicator.

**A**N hour passed. Two hours. Quitting time came, but no one went home. The day shift filled in the oncoming night shift

on the details of George Mercer's capture.

The staffers sat around, taking routine calls from the men on the beats, knocking out routine stories, doing the routine news roundups for the special clients, drinking coffee, getting in each other's way, smoking much too much.

The day operator, speaking of George, referred to him in the past tense. Kathy rebuked him gently.

He apologized.

They saw the Martian night come quickly, settle over the city and the sandy wastes beyond. Lights blazed on in Iopa, winked on here and there in the outskirts. But beyond that there was only blackness.

And somewhere out there was George.

Scott stopped pacing the floor and sat down with decision.

"It's not my responsibility any more," he said to no one in particular. "I've stood around like a helpless nincompoop long enough. It's time to call in the professionals."

"World Government?" Kathy asked.

Scott nodded. He reached for a handset.

George's voice beat him to it. "Hello, Galactic," it said.

Scott whirled in his chair. "Hello, you beat-up old report-

er," he yelled into the communicator. Then he asked kindly, "How is it, Georgie, kid?"

"Scott?" George said. "Working overtime again? Me, too. Listen, I'm all right, They saved my arm. Gave me a transfusion—crude but effective. What's more—listen carefully, boy—I'm not a nully. I'm as healthy and full of corpuscles as you are."

"That's great!" Scott said. "The gloom around here was so thick you could have planted lilies in it. But are you sure? How can you tell?"

"Also who, what, when and where," said George happily. "Allways the newsmen, you old ghoul. All right, I'll be objective. I don't know for absolutely sure, of course. Nothing you could dictate a bulletin on yet. But if you can get W.G.'s Health Commission to fly in some nully specialists, I'm ninety-nine per cent certain they'll find I'm no Typhoid Mary. And what's more—get this, Scott—neither are any of the Regulars."

"What?"

"I said the Regulars are not nullies. They were, but they're not any more. That's the who and the what. Here comes the why. Maybe you'd like to take it down."

"You're being recorded on tape, you hero," Scott said. "Go on."

"O KAY. I'm no medical writer, but it's my theory that nullies are bred in the slums. Dirt, malnutrition, bad sanitation. I think there's probably a psychosomatic angle to it, too—squalor, apathy and hopelessness play a part. But then they put the nullies in the colony here. The only object was segregation, but unconsciously they were also providing fresh air, good food—no substandard rations came in the airdrops—hard work and, most of all, incentive."

"Incentive?" Scott asked, puzzled.

"Sure, incentive. The will to live. The urge to survive is never stronger than when you've been cast off somewhere to die. A lot did die, of course. But the strongest survived and, in surviving, they licked the disease. They've rehabilitated themselves."

"Assuming that," Scott said, "what about the Deimons?"

"The creatures that attacked the Regulars," George said, "were Deimons in everything but form. Lane had it figured out the same way I did."

"Lane?" asked Scott.

"The leader of the Regulars," George said. "The man who saved my life. He's responsible for organizing these people out of mob chaos. He was a crewman on an Earth-Mars liner. In a nutshell, he signed off the ship to set up a

business in Iopa, got sick, was too proud to ask for help, caught the nully disease from a Martian woman who was taking care of him, then got rounded up with her."

From Lane, when George put him on, Scott learned that the Regulars had been aware of the danger from the fiery globes almost from the first—even before George had smuggled himself into the colony. They recognized them as sensient aliens, though they had no idea where they came from, and saw them take over the newcomers to the colony and make them into automata.

Lane reasoned that the Regulars were in some way different from the new nullies. Then the globes tried and failed to inhabit the Regulars. He concluded that the Regulars not only differed from the nullies, but that they had been cured of their disease.

**B**UT knowing something and proving it are two entirely different things," Lane told Scott. "Who would listen to us? We were the forgotten men, completely cut off from the outside. Our food came from the air. The pilots ignored the messages we wrote on the ground. If they took pictures of them, they thought they were a trick. The guards at the fences had shoot-first instructions and none of them ever came close enough to talk to."

"Rough," Scott agreed.

"That was the way things stood before your boy George Mercer came along. I guess he fooled the nullies, but he didn't fool us. George was just too smart a lad to be one of them. Then, when the globes wouldn't have anything to do with him, we knew he was for us."

"But he tried to reach you," Scott protested, "and you drove him off."

"That was a mistake," Lane said. "There was a new guard on watch and he got rattled. Believe me, we looked hard enough for him afterward, but didn't find him till that wild spear got him during the battle."

"That's reasonable, I suppose," Scott said. But he sounded doubtful and George cut back into the conversation.

"What's the matter, Scott? Come on, spill it. I know that tone of voice—it means you're full of question marks. Maybe you think I really have become a nully and this is all a trick to get me and my new buddies out. Is that it?"

"Well—" Scott said.

"Look, Scott," George said. "You've got a right to be skeptical. It'd be a terrible thing to bring a couple of hundred of us out into civilization and then find that we were—a sick menace. You'd never sleep again, I know.



How can I convince you?"

"George, it isn't that—"

"I've got to convince you. It's true that if I were a nully and was trying to kid you, I'd probably talk the same way as I am now . . . *kid* you! That's it, Scott! The kids!"

"What?" Scott sounded lost.

"The kids!" George yelled.

"The children! Send over a plane and take pictures, if you like. The population of the colony at the latest census was ninety-eight men, two dozen women and quite a number of children. There are over fifty kids here, Scott."

"Children?" said Scott, incredulous. "But nullies are known to be sterile."

"They sure are, Scott. That's my point! Nullies *are* sterile. *Ex*-nullies are not. That's the clincher, isn't it? That's the trump card to play on the Health Commission, if they're as stubborn as you are."

Scott laughed in relief. "Of course," he said. "I've got it now. Forgive me for being so slow." He turned to Kathy Brand. "Kathy, you heard it all. Get through to the Health Commission and tell them. George, shall we get a party out to you tonight?"

"Tomorrow'll be time enough, Scott. Some of these people have been here for ten years. Lane's one of them. Another ten hours

won't be an eternity. I'll be seeing you soon, Scott!"

GEORGE Mercer was sitting up in his bed as if it were a throne when Scott and Kathy visited him in Iopa General Hospital.

"Lap of luxury," George grinned. "Love it. Love you, too, Gorgeous," he said to Kathy. She bent and kissed him on the cheek. George winked at Scott. "Privileges of the convalescent," he said.

"How's the arm?" Scott asked.

"Coming along. Doc says Lane did a first-rate job on it, for an amateur. Lane's just down the hall. They're keeping him under observation. If he continues to respond to the biopsies and what-all, he'll be discharged in a month. His wife, too—the Martian woman he got rounded up with—and the children and the rest of them. How'd we do on the story, Scott?"

"We creamed them. Two-hour beat over the nearest opposition. And of course they had nothing like your eyewitnesser."

"Naturally," George said. "I wasn't a nully for nothing. By the way, Doc tells me they're setting aside the new wing of the hospital for future nullies. They'll have lots of air, good food and occupational therapy. Should be able to cure 'em in a year. Now if

we could clean up the slums . . .

"That's a job for parliament. You'll follow through on that angle when you get back to your old beat. But since parliament doesn't reconvene for three months, New York thought you might like to convalesce on Earth for a while."

"Oh, no!" George protested. "You seem to forget I'm still on assignment. You gave me the job of getting a story on the fire globes. Did I get it? No. They censored all that out of my copy—made it strictly a yarn about the nullies. So I'm still working, Chiefie."

"You talk like a man with a hole in his head, instead of his arm," Scott said. "That's another story entirely, those globes."

"You can't sweet-talk me out of it, Scott. When I get out of here, I want you to have a little spacer waiting for me. Just point it at Deimos and I'll do the rest. The Deimons got clobbered at the nully colony, sure. But they'll

be up to something else and if I'm on the job, maybe we won't be scooped by Interplanetary News again."

"It's still no—and it isn't just heartless old me saying it. W.G. sent a small armada up there and Deimos has been off limits for a week. We'll get the story eventually, I suppose, but I have a hunch that when we do, it'll be in the form of a communique."

George sank back into his pillow. "Shucks," he said mildly, looking at Kathy. Then he brightened. "How about Phobos? That's not off limits, is it?"

"No," Kathy said. "But why would anybody want to go to that forsaken rockpile?"

"We could look for the Phobosians, you and I," he said, "hand-in-hand in the Marslight, strolling from crag to crag." He leered at her. "Anyone for Phobos?"

Kathy grinned back at him.

"Loon," she said.

—RICHARD WILSON

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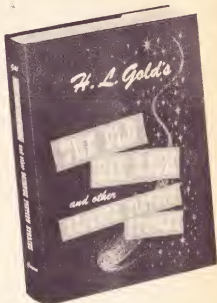
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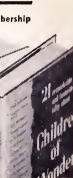
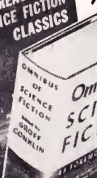
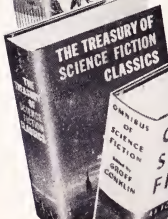
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